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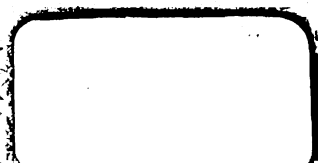
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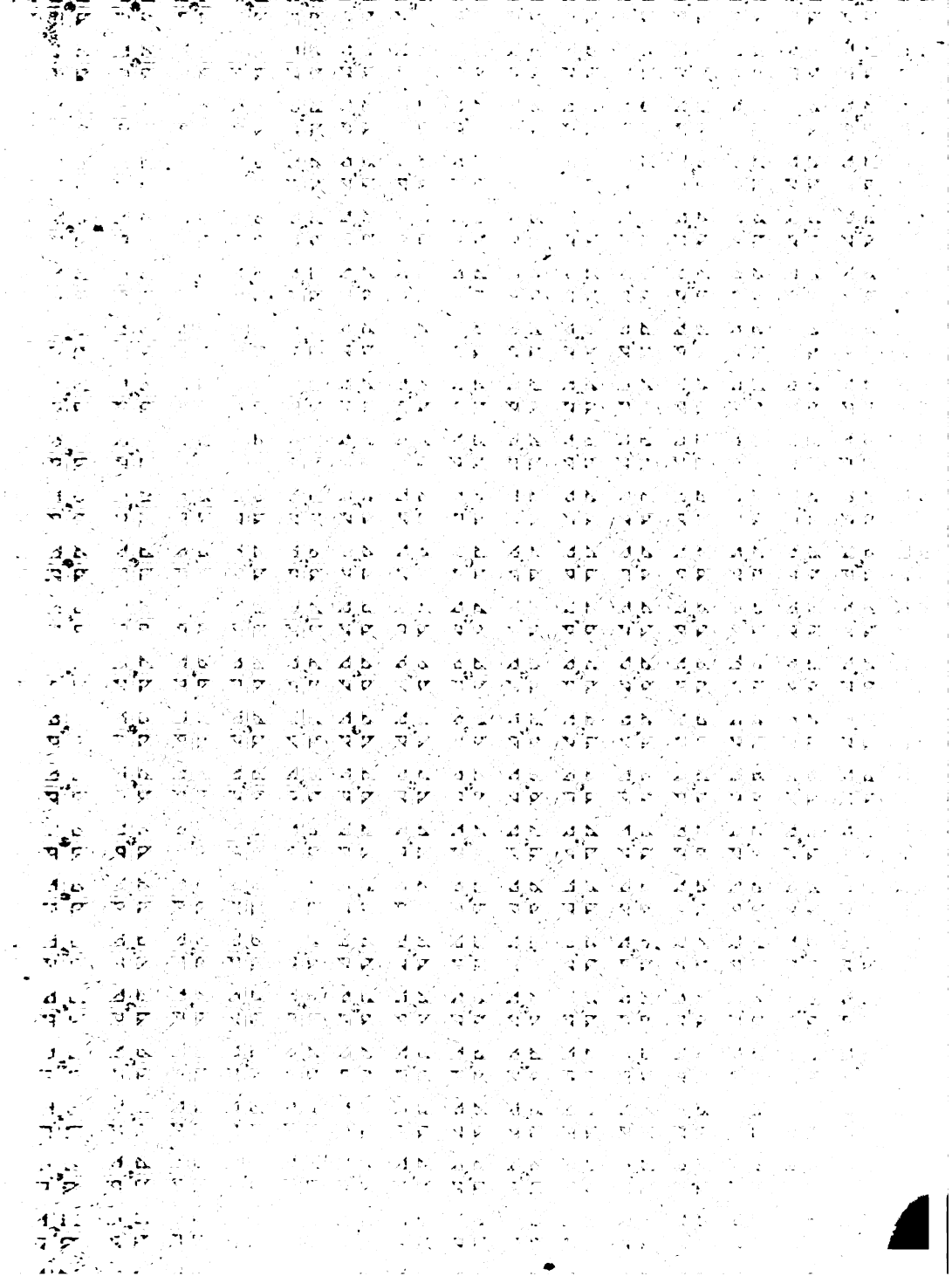


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WILL HE
MARRY HER?

PECK.

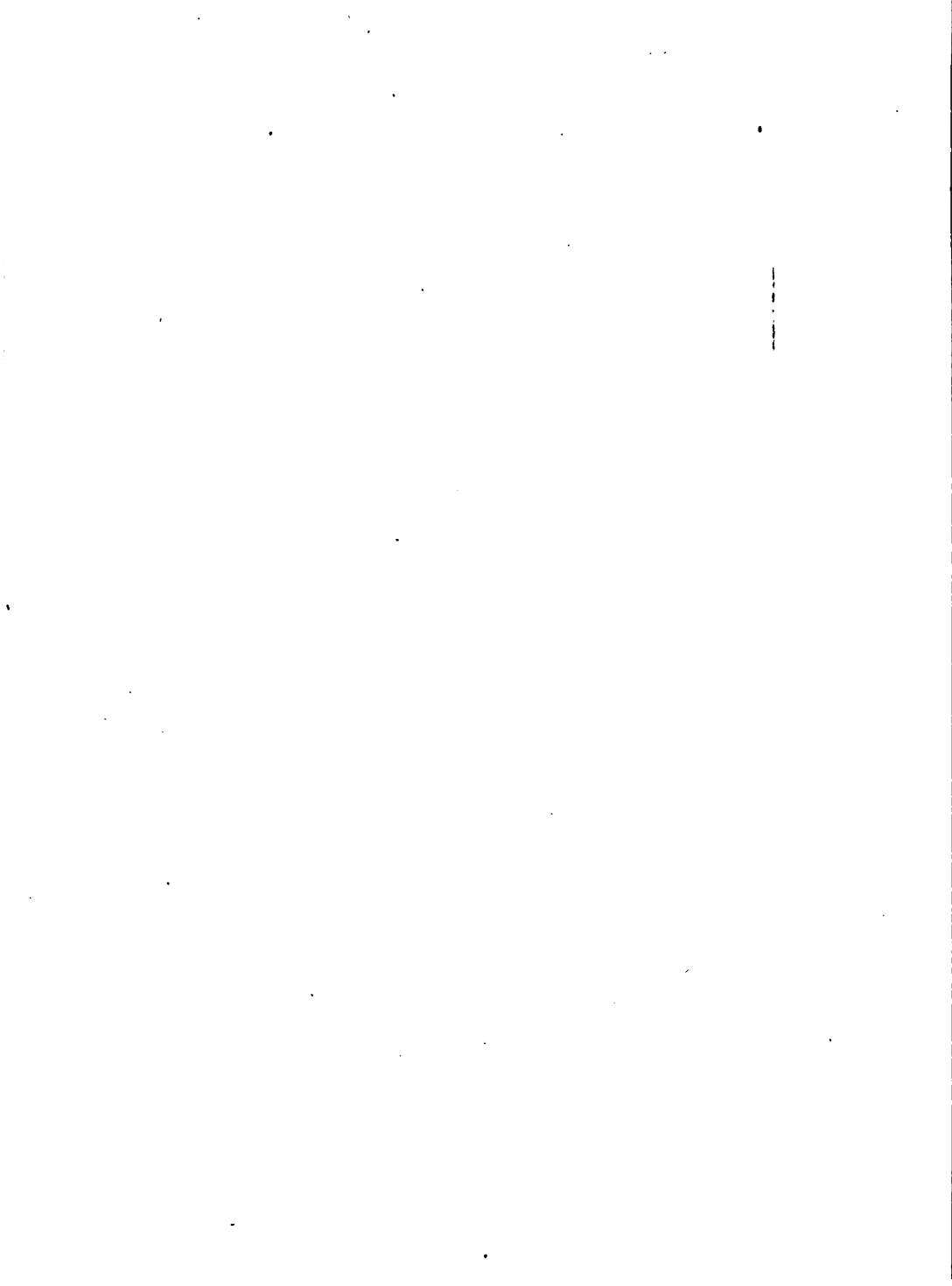




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George T. Smith
son Grand mother
Dec 27 1880

NCW
Teck







WILL HE MARRY HER?

A Domestic Drama For Home Reading.

PERFORMED BY

MAJOR PENNY,

AND A NUMEROUS STAFF OF AUXILIARIES.

WITH PORTRAITS OF THE PRINCIPAL PERFORMERS, AND PICTURES
OF THE MANY THRILLING INCIDENTS.

THE MUSIC BY THE TWINS THEMSELVES.

PECK.

"Haste to the wedding."—*Song.*
"A PENNY saved is a PENNY gained."—*Proverb.*

CHICAGO:

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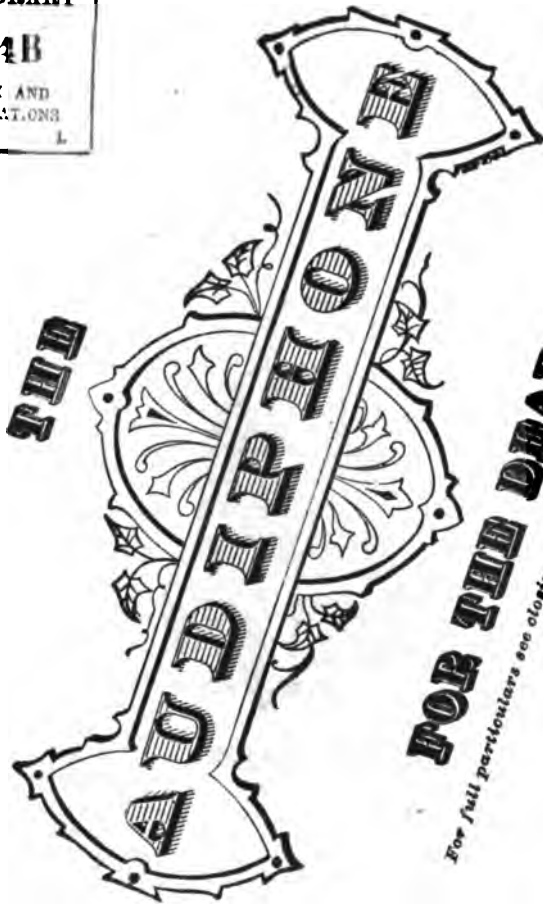
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FOR THE DEAD.

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INTRODUCTORY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—



THE MAJOR!

Purser & Co. - 30 December, 1844

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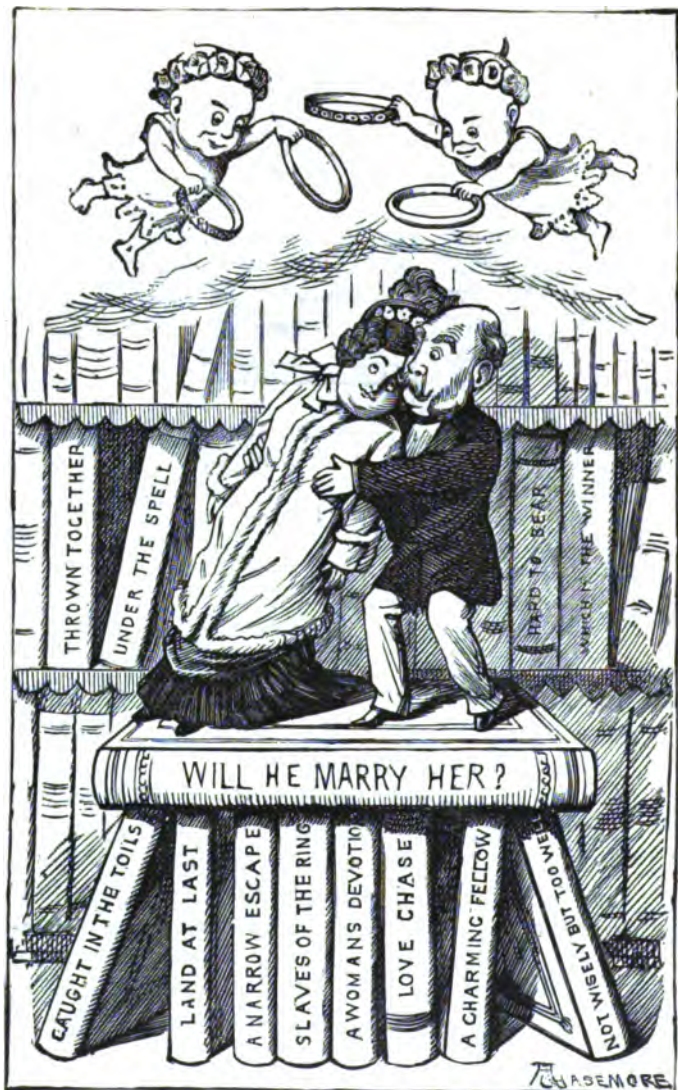
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Blocked.



CHAPTER I.

THEY MEET.

AM Major Penny, the head of our family. It is possible that my name may not be unknown in connection with Deeds of Daring on the Ensanguined Field, and I may also have been heard of as the uncle of the Twopenny Twins.

I am not prepared to describe myself as absolutely in the spring flowery period of my youth. Rather do I content myself by alluding to my time of life as the PRIME, and I refer to the accompanying illustrations, by Mr. Archibald Chasemore, those desirous of further particulars. I may, however, incidentally mention that I have a contempt for the youth of the present generation of the male sex, and, as an uncle of twins, experience has caused me to rather loathe boys than otherwise.

I do not deem it necessary for the purposes of this

narrative that I should just now enter into a lengthened account of my family, which consists, as upon previous occasions, of The Girls, my maiden sisters, who still remain of mature age, with a growing tendency towards increased maturity. They are named as heretofore, Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula Penny. It may also be added (with the kind permission of Mr. Longfellow) that rising young curates may come, and rising young curates may go, but that the Girls go off never.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the whole management of our household is yet dependent upon my exertions, and that, as of old, I check the groceries, audit the washing-book, and regulate things generally, and that I am now upon my way to town upon business of importance with our family solicitor.

As a journey to London is not an every-day occurrence, I have decided to take a bed at Dozer's private hotel for a couple of nights, and to seize this opportunity for doing a little shopping that I have had in contemplation for some time back. To carry out this project I find it necessary that I should take luggage with me, and, going into the matter, discover that the likeliest things in that way, at the moment upon the establishment, are a venerable hair-covered trunk with bald patches, and a carpet bag of weird floral design, which I pack tightly, and put what is left over into a bandbox, originally the property of Bathsheba.

Incidentally it may be mentioned, at this juncture, that the station nearest to my place of residence, which is in a rather out-of-the-way spot, is one from which, under existing regulations, you cannot book through



All there.

to London. It is necessary to take another ticket at Haggelbury Junction, where you also change carriages, cross a bridge, pass through a tunnel, and go up and down many steps, whilst your luggage crosses the line in a fitful fashion an article at a time, and is carefully flung down, the wrong side up, at the wrong end of the platform.

But here's the train. I am seated in it, and my luggage is stowed away in the van. Here, too (in due course), is Haggelbury Junction. Here (after some searching for him) is a porter to see to the things. Here are the steps, and here we go up, up, up, with some one pushing behind. Here are the bridge and more steps, and here we go down, down, down O, with somebody else pushing behind.

Here is the ticket office. "The other window round the corner." Which corner, I wonder? They seem to

be always changing the pay-places at this confounded station ; and there 's the bell ringing for my train !

It was I who was wrong, it would appear, though the ticket clerk need not have been so grossly impertinent ; and I don't believe, even now, he has given me the right change. However, I had better reckon it over again in the train, and——

“ Any more going on ? ”

“ Certainly ; I am ! Bless me ! I nearly forgot the bonnet-box, and—— ”



A little Mistake.

Some one calling after me ; some one young and engaging, in an extremely tight-fitting black dress.

“ You left this behind you, in the pay-place. Your ticket.”

“ A thousand thanks, my dear young lady. Permit me to assure you that I shall never—— ”

“ Now then, sir ; now then, miss ! you 'd better look sharp if you want to catch it.”

We have looked sharp. We have rushed madly

down a passage, and up more steps. We have been tossed and tumbled into a first-class carriage. I am panting, and she, seemingly quite cool and collected, is smiling. When I have got a little of my breath back again I'll conclude the sentence the vulgar porter fellow cut short.



Another

Before I have got my breath back, however, she says, "Are not you afraid you will catch cold, with your face to the wind?"

It is considerate on her part, of course; and yet I somehow don't quite like the idea of her asking the question, and reply hastily, "Oh, no, thank you; I like plenty of air."

By the way, though—(I make this reflection two or three minutes later)—there is a frightful draught here, and already I have got one cinder in one eye. She says, "I fear you will catch cold."

I say, "I beg pardon. You yourself would probably prefer it closed?"

"Oh, no," she says, "I am sitting with my back to the engine; I always do. Pray allow me."

Before I can interfere she has risen swiftly, and closed the window. At the moment I am so surprised I can't think of anything to say upon the subject. Then I venture to observe, "According to my experience, ladies, as a rule, prefer to ride the other way, facing the engine. Is it not so?"

She says, "Women, as a rule, are stupid. They don't generally know which way a train is going, and sit down on the wrong side. Then they want the window up, and annoy other people."

I say, "Madam, I am really much indebted to your care. Without you I should certainly have lost my ticket, and gained a sore throat."

She says, "Yes?" and opens a newspaper.

Meanwhile I contemplate her respectfully, and reflect. She is very young—seventeen, I should think—and very pretty, and perfectly at her ease. She is, possible, a great traveller. She seems quite used to travelling alone. She is evidently a remarkable young lady. I wonder who the deuce she is? I wonder also whether she knows that I am wondering. Probably she knows I am looking at her, although nothing could be more tranquil and seemingly unconscious than her face.

"You have no paper," she says, suddenly. "Would you like half this? Here is the war news: nothing fresh."

I thank her courteously, and accept the proffered sheet, observing, as I do so, that the Eastern Difficulty appears to be as far from solution now as ever. She

says, "As an army man, you are, of course, able to study its military aspect. From that point of view it must be deeply interesting."



Upon my word of honour, I doubt whether I **have** ever had the good fortune to meet with so well-informed a young lady. I have given her my views of the whole business, and she agrees with me perfectly. I **have** also related the principal incidents connected with the Indian Mutiny, which I was in part instrumental in quelling, and mention the number of black fellows I myself gave orders to be blown from guns. I really had no idea the time had passed so quickly. Here we are, actually at our journey's end!

"Hallo, guard! Open this window! Let us out!"



The Last (for the present).

There is no one to attend to one, of course; and,

after frantic struggles I manage to get down the glass, and am now straining every nerve to get hold of the handle outside.

"There is a handle inside," she says; "allow me." And turning it as she speaks, the difficulty is at an end.

She is really a most remarkable young lady! Who and what is she? Where does she live?

"Is not that your bandbox?" she inquires. I was leaving it behind me again in the confusion. "I noticed it in your hand," she adds, smiling slightly: "it struck me as rather a strange kind of thing for you to carry—Major."

CHAPTER II.

HE GETS INTO TROUBLE.

It has frequently been remarked upon the *Ensangued Field* (and elsewhere) that I, Major Penny, never lose my presence of mind. A Distinguished Commanding Officer (now, alas! no more) once observed during a review of cavalry (auxiliary), when our corps had been charged by a runaway animal attached to a conveyance belonging to an itinerant greengrocer, and our line broken in several places: "Major," he said, as I was in the act of picking myself up and recovering my hat and sword, whilst giving the word

of command to my men to form a square—"Major Penny, you're equal to the occasion."

Under these circumstances I simply ask, and naturally pause for a reply after asking, "How is it that I should now be nowhere?" Briefly summarized, the facts are these: A young and lovely lady, hitherto a perfect stranger, has shared a first-class carriage with me during a journey of an hour and fifteen minutes, during which we have discussed the Eastern Question and other novel topics of absorbing interest, and at parting at the terminus in London I am on the point of delicately expressing a hope that this meeting shall not be our last, when all at once a series of untoward circumstances occur, and she goes one way in a cab, and my luggage goes another, and I go a third, crying aloud for a hair trunk, a carpet bag of weird floral design, and a bandbox containing a hat.

At the very instant that I am gently pressing a tiny gloved hand, and am just beginning to make an observation, my eye falls upon my hair trunk being



Energy of the Major.

pounced upon and borne away by a reckless porter, and, hastily excusing myself, I dash after him.

The porter repudiates my ownership of the hair trunk, but I grapple with him, and after a desperate encounter recover my property. Whilst doing so, however, my eye falls upon the carpet bag of weird floral design departing in an opposite direction, and recovering that also by resorting to similar violence, I seize both triumphantly, whilst in my excitement I trample on the bandbox, and gaze around for the cab with the young lady in it.

She is gone. I search wildly, but in vain, dragging my property about with me; and at length, bitterly disappointed and prostrate with fatigue, call a cab myself, and bid the driver take me to Dozer's Hotel.

It is possible, should you be a Londoner, you may never even have heard of Dozer's, as I have reason to believe that the hotels of London are known only to visitors from the country, who hunt them up in Bradshaw, and drive to them in a desperate kind of way, because they know no better. In like fashion I hunted up Dozer, and put myself into the hands of Providence.

The cabman himself does not know Dozer, but he knows the name of the street where Dozer dozes, which is Middlesex Street, Strand.

I find that Dozer's is a private house of a remarkably genteel and quiet exterior, with a white doorstep, and the name of Dozer on a bright brass plate.

I see nothing of Dozer himself, but I take a wiry little lady, with tight corkscrew curls on either side of her temples, to be Mrs. Dozer, and am confirmed in

that opinion by her popping out from a kind of cupboard as I cross the mat, and popping down upon me bustling me and my luggage upstairs to a spare room.

Whilst, as a general rule, objecting to be popped upon and hustled (a thing I never permitted, in my own house, from the Girls), I see no particular reason to object to the apartment provided for me, or the tin can of hot water.

It is not my intention, this evening, to commence upon the business that has brought me to town, but I shall get at it the very first thing in the morning. In the meanwhile I see no particular reason why I should not have a nice little bit of dinner, and go afterwards to the play. Upon inquiry I find that I can have a very nice dinner indeed at Dozer's *table d'hôte*, which takes place in half an hour, and I have just time to dress.

My dress clothes were packed, according to my directions, in the hair trunk, and laid out flat. I'll unpack them.—Hullo!



Astonishment of the Major.

It is extraordinary that when you leave a thing—the simplest thing, indeed—for another person to do, it is invariably done wrong. Bathsheba has done something to the lock of the hair trunk, and I can't get the key to turn.—Ah!

At last I have done it. I can't get the key out again, though; but the trunk is open. Good gracious!

What on earth did Bathsheba mean by cramming an antiquated crinoline arrangement in here, on the top of—a flannel petticoat! This is awful! this is terrible! This is positively appalling! After all it would appear that the hair trunk, for the possession of which I struggled with that porter, was *not* mine. On referring to the outside of the lid, I see now, only too plainly, I was mistaken. My hair trunk had many more ball places. There must have been two hair trunks, then.

“Who's there?”

The Boots who brought my things upstairs says a policeman and a person from the railway are below, and want to speak to me.



Dismay of the Major.

On reaching the passage the very porter meets my view, and instantly seizes me. He is out of breath.

It subsequently transpires he has run all the way after the cab; but he manages to gasp out, "That is the man who stole the trunk."

This is confoundedly ridiculous, and confoundedly awkward and unpleasant. The Boots looks very serious, so does Mrs. Dozer. I'll be hanged but I hardly know what to say. If I only had a friend who could speak to my respectability, and—

In the name of all that is astonishing, here is one. Here is, in point of fact, the very identical long-lost young lady.



Rescue of the Major.

"This is Major Penny," she says.

"Bless me! you don't say so?" cries Mrs. Dozer. "The Major Penny you were just speaking of? Policeman, my niece knows Major Penny. He is an officer in the Army, and highly connected."



CHAPTER III.**SHE SAVES HIM.**

MY stay in town has been rather longer than I had at first intended it should be. The Girls have written to ask how the legal business that brought me up to town is progressing, and whether I am comfortable at Dozer's.

Dozer's is quite a little world of its own, and has little in common with the noisy thoroughfare north of it. Its members have, in a general way, a scared, rabbit-like look on them, and connive in shady places on landings.

There is a good deal of whispering going on at Dozer's, which is partly owing to the dense population of the place, for at night, to judge by the snoring, there can scarcely be a cupboard unoccupied, and whatever out-of-the-way nook you creep into, there is at least one eavesdropper peeping over your shoulder or breathing in the nape of your neck.

The society being equally divided, as well as I can make out, between very newly-married couples and spinster ladies of mature age, the whispering and listening may, to a certain extent, be satisfactorily accounted for.

Before I have been many hours an inmate of Dozer's hotel, Mrs. Dozer has informed me, confidentially, that the company she entertains is, without exception, most

select, and that everybody is closely connected with the very highest county families. Possibly their furtive look, as though they were travelling *incognito* and were in momentary expectation of discovery, may be owing to their having put up at Dozer's, whose advertisements are seemingly framed for the purpose of attracting the economically disposed.

During the periods between meals the rabbits are scattered about; visiting, as well as I can understand, the most harmless and inexpensive of London sights, of which, in a shamefaced way, they impart the details to one another at meal-times, blushing much.

I observe that I am treated with great deference by the little company, which I confess is gratifying, it being, indeed, what I have been accustomed to; and when I make an observation at the dinner-table, there is a courteous silence.

As, as a rule, nobody else makes observations of an audible character except myself or Mrs. Dozer, or her niece (Miss Pinner) when asking my opinion upon a subject; the silence, when not as above described as courteous, is usually profound.

Indeed, after three days' experience of Dozer's, I find that what I may call the extraneous observations (those, I mean, not emanating from me) refer to requests for small pieces more, and regrets that there is a necessity to trouble the person nearest the potatoes to pass one.

On the arrival of any fresh rabbit (they come and go from time to time), I overhear Mrs. Dozer pointing me out to the new-comer as one of her most valued acquisitions, a gentleman of the highest connexions,

and an officer of the highest rank, who has been through all "the wars," a statement which certainly is rather too sweeping, but being in the form of a private communication to another person, I hardly see how I can interfere with it.

Only presently, when Mrs. Dozer takes me on one side to whisper that the newest comer is Mr. Tomkins, of the Midland Counties, whose family I must have heard of as one of the oldest and most highly esteemed, I half feel inclined to say, "They're a rum-looking lot, if they're all that pattern."

Away from the Dozers', I have been progressing, I cannot deny, somewhat slowly with the business that brought me to town. The fact is, that from a combination of circumstances, Mrs. Dozer, Miss Pinner, and I have been twice to the play, and taken an oyster or two, on one occasion, afterwards, and a lobster on the other; and next day I hardly got into the City in time to catch my man. Again, Miss Pinner and I have visited a picture gallery or two, and that occupied the greater portion of two days. The fact of Miss Pinner being an orphan, with nobody in London but her aunt, who is necessarily confined to the house a good deal, to go out with, has really necessitated certain sacrifices on my part on the score of gallantry.

In short, I am suddenly startled on the morning of the fifth day by discovering that I have been so long in town, and, as yet, done nothing. I therefore take my bath with determination, resolutely thrust on my habiliments, breakfast lightly, ignore the newspaper, and take a 'bus to the Bank.

I may here mention that my chief object in coming

to town is to transfer a portion of my money from the quarter in which I have invested it to other quarters where I can get much more for it, and that in so doing I act in accordance with a determination I have arrived at some considerable time, though I have not thought fit to mention the circumstance to the Girls.

The necessary process of transfer is a somewhat tedious one, and is moreover fraught with a certain amount of unpleasantness, owing to my having to break it to one man of business that it is my intention to place my affairs in the hands of another. I am not personally acquainted with the other, but I shall of course make the strictest inquiries before doing anything definite. The first part of the process takes such a long while, and the amount of pedestrianism necessary before getting at the people I am to make strict inquiry of, results in my eventually deciding on taking a certain amount of risk in the matter, leaving the business in No. 2's hands, and taking a cab back to Dozer's, thoroughly dead-beat.



Five-o'clock Tea.

I find Mrs. Dozer and Miss Pinner at their five-o'clock tea, and join them, at their request.

Mrs. Dozer remarks that I look knocked up, and suggests a teaspoonful of brandy. I allow that I am tired, take the brandy, and, feeling better, briefly describe the business I have been on.

"Did you say the name of your new man of business was Fogson?" asks Miss Pinner, excitedly. "Good heavens, aunt! do you think it's the same person who robbed and ruined poor papa?"



Deeds of Violence.

I am in a hansom flying along the Embankment. We are blocked up on Ludgate Hill. I am out of the hansom, flying along on foot. I am in another hansom. I am at Fogson's office. Fogson is not in. The clerk does not know whether or not he will return that evening. I have got hold of that clerk, and am shaking him.



Saved! Saved!!

I see my precious documents on Fogson's table yet untouched. I bound towards them, seize them with a yell of triumph, and fly to the door. I have escaped. I am saved; but I have scarcely a gasp of breath left in me, and I reach Dozer's again more dead than alive.



The Major's Preserves.

The ladies are in a state of the greatest anxiety, and they are powerfully moved by the news of my success. Mrs. Dozer laughs, Miss Pinner's eyes fill with tears, and next moment I am on my knees blessing her as my Preserver to whom I shall ever owe a deep debt of gratitude. At a moment of this kind one is not always so careful as one might be in one's choice of language.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE SEES AFTER HIM.

IT has been remarked, upon the Ensanguined Field, and subsequently, whilst retreating under heavy fire, by a Distinguished Officer (alas! now no more—not the same one, however referred to in a previous chapter), that I, Major Penny, am seemingly impervious to fatigue when called upon for the display of sustained action.

“Major,” said the Distinguished Officer above alluded to (I have told the story upon many occasions at mess dinners and public banquets, and incorporated it into a letter to the Editor of the *Times*, which, however, was not printed), “Major, there is nothing left for us but to run for it, so let us put our best legs forward.” And we did, too.

"Major," said the same Distinguished Officer, speaking of the circumstance some time afterwards, "I shall never forget you. You led us, Major."

It was the case; and upon subsequent occasions when it became necessary to employ similar tactics, it was the case again.

"Major," said the same officer, after one of these, "at heading a retreat you have no equal."

How is it, then, that I, who have thus braved fatigue, and kept up a two-mile run without turning a hair, whilst the cannons have thundered and the deadly missiles rent the air in the rear, should now be utterly prostrate after the excitement of that rush to the fraudulent person's office in the City, for the purpose of recovering my precious documents?

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to spend any further time in conjecture. The fact remains: I am quite knocked up. Mrs. Dozer says I have taken a chill, and recommends me to put my feet in hot water with a spoonful of mustard in it.



I have done so. I have also had something warm, and have gone to bed early.

But next morning I don't yet feel quite well, and Mrs. Dozer advises me to keep my room for a day or two, and take care of myself. Mrs. Dozer promises that she also will take care of me, and Miss Pinner says she will too.



I am at present occupied as above, and Mrs. Dozer

fetches and carries things at regular intervals; and I have had a little physic, and a good deal of broth, and some jelly, and a chop or two, and, for an invalid, don't feel altogether uncomfortable.

I am at this moment reaching a stage of convalescence wherein the pains have passed away, leaving only lassitude, best relieved by tonics, with intervals when I am desperately peckish, and call aloud for more chops.



The Ministering Angel.

Through this stage, however, as during the Crisis before the Turn, Miss Pinner ministers to my wants with sweet solicitude, gliding gently to and fro, giving obdurate pillows delicate little digs with a nonsensicaly small fist, and adjusting and readjusting screens and curtains with scrupulous nicety. Mrs. Dozer is also assiduous, but flouncy; and brings with her sudden draughts, and goes away again leaving doors

open, which I get up and close, using language as I do so.

But then comes Miss Pinner again, and all once more is gentleness and peace, and a soft, soothing influence lulls the nerves of the excited Invalid, and it is time for a little more broth or jelly, or another chop!

Succeeding this period of convalescence is another period of greater convalescence still, when the Invalid, acting on advice, takes little strolls—Miss Pinner at his side in case of need, for he is as yet far from strong—as far as Adelphi Terrace or the garden on the Embankment, between Waterloo Bridge and Charing Cross Railway.

A day or two more, and the Invalid's strength is so far recovered that more lengthened journeys are projected and undertaken, including one by the Underground Railway, from the Temple to the Mansion



“Weigh both the two on yer for three 'a'pence.”

House Station, for the purpose of ascending the Monument—a feat which Miss Pinner asserts she has, all her life, been longing to accomplish.

At the Temple Station a boy in charge of the weighing machine urges us to try our "c'reck weight." "On'y a penny, sir," he says; and then in desperation, as the proposal is scornfully rejected, "Weigh both the two on yer for three 'a'pence."

The boy is rebuked for this unseemly levity. The train comes up and bears the couple away. Presently, arrived at Cannon Street, a short walk brings us to our journey's end, and we pay threepence each and begin going up the steps.

What makes the Invalid lag behind? Because he is an invalid, perhaps? No, there is another reason. Throughout the day he has been intending to ask a certain question, on which much depends.



"These steps are too much for you, I'm afraid, Major."

It occurred to him early this morning that man was not born to live alone, and that, in an invalided state, it was soothing to be waited on by a sympathetic soul. The question which arose out of these reflections, and bore direct reference to them, was upon the very point of being asked at the Temple Station when the confounded boy there began bothering. The presence of an unsympathizing crowd in the railway-carriage prevented the question being asked then. Now, surely, time and place were fitting, and the only difficulty was how to begin.

"These steps are too much for you, I am afraid, Major," Miss Pinner says. "It was inconsiderate of me to ask you to come. Do take my hand, and I will help you."

I have no doubt that nothing could be kinder than Miss Pinner's motive; but it cannot be denied that the situation, were the Major to allow himself to be pully-hoyed up as suggested, would be wanting in dignity.

However, he has not breath enough to climb stairs and ask questions at the same time.

As a natural sequence to the Monument is Birch's, in Cornhill. Miss Pinner has never yet eaten real turtle-soup, and has all her life been longing to do so.

On this occasion she tastes some of the best, and takes a sip or two of punch afterwards.

She said sherry, but I said punch; and now it is time for us to go back again to Dozer's.

There was quite a crowd at Birch's, and we could not get a table to ourselves, so there was no opportunity of asking the question there.



“Oh, Major, did you ever see such a lot of wedding-rings?”

Will there be any on the way back by the Underground? Very likely not. In that case, when and how—

“Oh, Major, do look here! did you ever see such a lot of wedding-rings together in one window? Who on earth can buy them?”



The question *has* been asked. It has been pronounced sudden—and *so* unexpected—but it is under consideration.

Mrs. Dozer has to be consulted, and Dozer—(I believe I have hitherto omitted to mention that there is also a Dozer of the male sex; but he is of no consequence whatever).



The Dozers have been consulted now, and everybody has given their consent.

I cannot say upon whose authority the Rabbits have been consulted, but I believe that such has been the case, and that the whole warren are consenting parties to the proposed matrimonial arrangement. Indeed, I do not think I exaggerate the state of things when I say that general joy prevails, and the dinner-bell is ringing.

Here, too, is the post. And here is a letter from my maiden sisters.

What's this? Confound it! The Girls, my maiden sisters, have heard from some one I met accidentally in town that I have been very ill.

Why ever did I come to town alone?

And without my flannels!

How inconsiderate!

How unkind, how thoughtless of me not to write! And when would I have finished that dreadful legal business? It was the anxiety and worry about that which had made me ill.

But I must worry myself no more. The Girls themselves have determined to come up and see to it and see to me.

Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula will start by the first train to-morrow morning.

Here's a go!

CHAPTER V.

HE DOES DESPERATE DEEDS.



It would appear the Girls are bent upon taking decisive steps. It would seem that the Girls have made their minds up, and if I may be permitted a colloquial expression, mean to be "down on" me.

This is really very funny of the Girls! I have before now (see "Twopenny Twins" for particulars) observed that upon occasion the Girls rise equal to it, and form a square, as it were, with bayonets fixed.

This behaviour on the part of the Girls makes me smile—not unkindly, I trust; but still I cannot resist smiling. It is really too preposterous that I, who on the Ensanguined Field—that I, in point of fact—I, Major Penny, should be taken to task for what I do, and called to order by elder sisters, like a refractory small boy. Not, by the way, that I have exactly been called to order, but it might as well be clearly understood that I don't mean to be.

Where are the pen and ink? I'll just dash off a line or two to the Girls (there's just time to catch the post). I'll just dash off a line or two that I rather fancy the Girls will find a Settler.





The Major dashing off a few lines.

I have been dashing off a lot of lines, and have dashed off the points of a pen or two, and upset some ink ; but as yet I am not satisfied.

Ah, to be sure ! Why did I not think of that before ? I'll send a telegram.

The telegram is a noble institution, and saves a lot of awkwardness. You sometimes do not know how the deuce to begin a letter, and whether you ought to say the person you are writing to is your "dear sir," or only "dear sir," or simply "sir," or whether he ought not to be "dear Mr." whatever his name is. But in a telegram, or, indeed, on the humble post-card, no beginning is necessary ; and, again, there is no hesitation needed at the end relative to your being his "sincerely," "truly," "faithfully," or "obediently."

Then again—and this is the grand point—you can be abrupt, and need not go into any confounded troublesome explanations.

In the present instance a telegram is just exactly what I want. Here's a form, and here goes.

Let's see, now. You can get twenty words for your shilling. I shan't want as much.

* * * * *

It is a confounded difficult thing to allay anxiety and express oneself intelligibly in twenty words, but I flatter myself I have done so; and now for a messenger to run with this to the telegraph-office — and now for dinner.

* * * * *

When I come to think of it, now the telegram is gone, and there is no hope of recalling it, was it altogether politic on my part to say I was just upon the point of starting for Liverpool on business of importance, and that I would write full particulars in a day or two? Does not this almost seem like procrastinating the evil day? and won't the real explanation get awkward and awkwarder to make, the longer it is put off?

Possibly—only dinner is served just now, and it is all right for the present.

The dinner-hour at Dozer's has, gradually, become quite a pleasurable event to be looked forward to. As the oldest, and I may add the most honoured, of Mrs. Dozer's guests, I take the head of the table, whilst Mrs. Dozer faces me. The male Dozer does not dine with us. Not being able to get home from the City in time, he has some lukewarm bits and bats by himself, out in the passage or somewhere.

From the head of the table I lead the conversation to topics of general interest, such as the Eastern Diffi-

culties, and casually refer to past experience in time of war. This evening in particular I fight several battles o'er again, and charge the enemy with much slaughter, whilst, by the aid of the remains of the roast sirloin before me, I vividly conjure up the aspect of the Ensanguined Field. I observe while thus employed that some among the guests shudder and turn pale, and Miss Pinner, gently pressing my arm, says, "Major, you're positively too awful! Pray don't."

This is not the first time that the graphic force of my narratives has met with such flattering recognition, although my letters may not be thought to be worthy of insertion in the *Times* by those in power in Printing House Square.

After dinner Miss Pinner retires to Mrs. Dozer's private parlour, where I presently follow her. Upon my entrance I am under the impression that she is asleep, but she says she was only thinking. As is, I presume, usual under such circumstances, I say, "Of what?" She says, "I was trying to remember how many steps there were up to the top of the Monument."

After this we sit hand in hand for a time, silently. Then suddenly the Boots opens the door.

"Some ladies want to see you, Major," says the Boots. "They say their name is Penny."

The deuce they do! It's the Girls!



This really is most unreasonable conduct on the part of the Girls. Indeed, I call it scarcely delicate; and so I'll tell them when——

They are in the dining-room, sitting in a row, and



This Girls assembled.

on their faces is an expression indicative of the deepest anxiety. As I enter they rise simultaneously, and then one at a time, according to seniority, fall upon my neck and sob.

I say, "Don't make a scene! What the deuce is the matter?"

Bathsheba says, "Why did you keep it a secret from us?"

What does she mean? I somehow feel what I have heard described as sneaky. I trust I don't also look it. "But," I say, "it has been nothing serious."

"Oh, do not say that!" cries Cassandra; "in a question of the heart——"

"What do you mean by the heart?" I say. "The heart, had nothing whatever to do with it."

"Oh, brother! brother!" cry all the Girls in chorus. "This is unworthy of you; but may you be happy

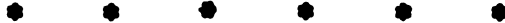
with her. *We* have done our best ; but that is past and gone. *We* are only in the way—now.”



I do really think this is most unseemly on the part of the Girls. At their time of life they ought to know better.

There is not room for them at Dozer's, which is just now choke-full, so they have gone to another hotel near at hand. and in the morning I suppose I had better introduce them to Jemima.

It may possibly be rather a shock to them to know that Miss Pinner's name is Jemima. Not only because the names in our family have hitherto had a more elevated and ornamental turn about them (according to *some* tastes), but also because there has already been a Jemima connected with our family, who turned out disastrously. Indeed, she married the Twopenny, and was the mother of The Twins !



There is a knock at the door. Another visitor for me. This time my old friend and companion-in-arms, Captain Pincher.

Pincher apologizes for intruding (I do not disguise from him the fact that, to a certain extent, I look upon his visit in that light), and says that he came up in the same train with the Girls, and that he had endeavoured to reach my hotel first, to warn me I was to be taken by surprise.

“Confound it, sir !” I cry. “the behaviour of those Girls is altogether preposterous.”

"It is, sir," says Pincher, shaking hands with me warmly.



Putting it to Pincher.



Pincher is not such a fool as I took him for. I will introduce him to Jemima.

I have. He takes her hand—both hands. He kisses her.

"I say, look here——"

"My dear young lady, I am delighted to make your acquaintance," he says; "and yours too, madam" (to Mrs. Dozer). "Your future husband, ma'am" (still to Mrs. Dozer), "is the oldest friend I have in the world."

Then aside to me: "How old is the daughter? She is a fine girl."



CHAPTER VI.

THEY ARE BETROTHED.

THEY have met.

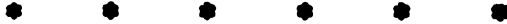
The Girls and Miss Pinner have had an interview, and I am not sorry it is over.

It occurred this morning. The Girls entered, as it were, to slow music, and formed a group. Then Miss Pinner was sent for. "My dear, my sisters," I said, and the Girls replied in chorus, "We are very gratified to make your acquaintance," and all three stretched out their right hands stiffly.

There is something singularly firm and resolute about the Girls since this interview, and they act and speak in concert, as though they were clockwork. It is confoundedly absurd of them, and I wish they wouldn't.

Miss Pinner remarks it too, and says, "Are they always like that? How funny!"

I do really wish to goodness the Girls wouldn't. It is not a pleasant thing for the members of one's family to present themselves in a humorous light to future members, and go on like Jacks-in-boxes.



Another day has passed; we have been betrothed now more than thirty-six hours. The sensation is remarkable, and probably is pleasurable also when one gets more used to it. At present, however, it is rather like acting a play, and there is more drawing up in rows and taking front places, so to speak, among

the other guests at the hotel than I quite care for ; and between ourselves, I don't mind owning that I've pretty well had enough of everybody's congratulations.

Why, confound it all, old Dozer himself has been at it! The Male Dozer, I mean. Though I have scarcely ever exchanged a word with him since I've been in the house, he has had the audacity to dig me, Major Penny, in the ribs, and call me, Major Penny, a sly dog!

"Sir!" I ejaculate.



"We're worth all the young 'uns put together, aren't we, Major?"

"Ah!" Dozer Male goes on, with a feeble chuckle, "we're worth all the young 'uns put together, aren't we, Major?"

This is almost comic of Dozer Male. From sheer absurdity I cannot very well take offence at it, so I let Dozer Male go on chuckling, and treat him with the contempt he deserves.



It is remarkable how calmly Miss Pinner takes it all. To look at her one would imagine she had been betrothed all her life—had, so to speak, starred in the part all round the provinces.

In my own mind I had formed certain resolutions with regard to the marriage and honeymoon. I had fixed upon some quiet City church—I don't care to be made a show of—and a month at some peaceful village on the coast of Devon (I hate your vulgar, crowded sea-side places) would be delightful!

But it would appear that Miss Pinner has also got her views upon the subject.

"There is only one way of spending a honeymoon properly," she says, "and that is by making a tour through Europe."

There is a sense of wideness and space, not to mention the money it would come to, about this idea that takes my breath away. Yet, if she has really set her heart upon it, and Cook and those other people does these things so much cheaper nowadays—

"But," she continues—it seems she has not finished the sentence yet—"there is no necessity for such extravagance, and it would be a much wiser course, it seems to me, to spend the money upon our house, for you know there will be so many things wanted."

This is really most considerate, and, indeed, most remarkable on the part of Miss Pinner, and, as well as I am able to judge, wholly unprecedented on the part of so young a woman, under such circumstances.

In other respects, also, Miss Pinner is remarkable. I had had my doubts respecting the way things should be arranged after the honeymoon, as far as our future

home is concerned. Of course the Girls, who have previously shared my home with me, cannot be turned adrift. That is certain. But at the same time it is also certain that Mrs. Major Penny that is to be will not be able to share my home with the Girls.

It is true that as yet there has been no bloodshed, but Miss Pinner and the Girls occupy a position towards each other just now which leaves much to be desired.

Not being able to speak from personal experience, and Pincher being also ignorant on the point, I can't quite decide how a betrothed couple are supposed to spend their time. I have hitherto been under the impression that they wandered about hand in hand, and sat together a long while silently with hands clasped, but I don't think Miss Pinner is that kind of girl.



The Calculating Girl.

On the contrary, she is as a rule absorbed in arith-

metic. She sends to upholsterers for their price lists and makes a study of them. All by herself she attends sales, and annotates her catalogue. She says it will be a useful check against imposition when we begin buying.



Cocker's a fool to it.

"Look at her, Major," says Mrs. Dozer, with enthusiasm; "there's sums for you! there's addition, subtraction, long division. Why, Cocker's a fool to it!"

Mrs. Dozer is a well-meaning woman, but wanting in delicacy, sometimes.

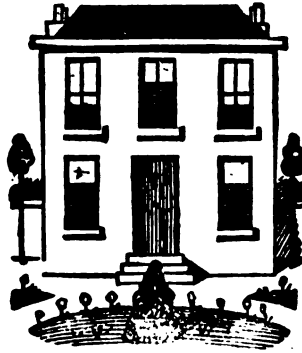
"She'll look after you, Major," Dozer Male also observes later on, "same as my missus has me. They all do it, sir! It's right they ought."

* * * * *

Perhaps, by the way, it is time to begin to buy things, instead of only looking at them being bought by other people. I have now decided on leaving the Girls the house we have hitherto occupied, and taking

a small cottage or villa myself somewhere in a genteel suburb. I mention the fact to Miss Pinner.

"I have thought of that," she says, "and have written to most of the house agents. Do you care for this style?"



The style.

The style is neat and plain—very much so, indeed; and it is also small and compact.

"It is scarcely picturesque," I venture to observe; "but with a Virginia creeper or some clematis——"

"They harbour earwigs, I am told," she replies.

"Then we won't have them," I cry, kissing the hand in which she holds the picture. "And it *is* compact and snug: it shall be our little nest, and we will be the little birds to roost in it. I'll take it at once."

"Had you not better have in a surveyor first?" says Miss Pinner.



CHAPTER VII.

HE NAMES THE DAY.

THERE are several quiet churches still existing in the City.

There is Saint Canker-in-the-Close, and Saint Creeper in Backslider Street, and several others, but I have given the preference to Saint Starvus-cum-Bagabones, and that's where I intend the ceremony to take place.

Saint Starvus is round a corner down a crooked lane, which on a week-day is blocked up by heavy waggons, and is full of strange noises, the shouting of men, the clatter of horses' hoofs, the creaking of cranes, and the rattling of chains.

But on Sunday a surprising calm pervades the neighbourhood, which, however, can scarcely be called holy, because nobody thereabouts goes to church. They do not toll a bell at Saint Starvus's, either because they do not think it necessary or because they have not got one.

There is a parson laid on, who comes there when he is well enough, and a mysterious official, who is supposed to be the verger, and who is also the clerk; and there is an opener of pews, whose place, as far as the opening is concerned, is a sinecure.

As regards the reliable congregation. He is one in number. He attends regularly, fair weather or foul, and sits in the free seats and listens meekly when

there is anything to listen to, or meekly takes himself off again after waiting half an hour or so on those occasions when the pastor does not put in an appearance.

Two or three old ladies, believed to be stone deaf, and a boy of empty mind, collect together within the old venerable pile from time to time, but they cannot be relied on.

The congregation, therefore, can only be fairly reckoned as one in number—a doddering old gentleman who was born and brought up in the crooked lane at a house pulled down long ago to make way for a many-storied building, in front of which waggons load and unload all day long ; and now he comes from a distance to listen to the same pastor under whom he has sat for over half a century.

It is my intention that the wedding ceremony shall be as private as possible, and I rather fancy I have hit upon a tolerably sneaky place for it to occur in.



Talking it over.

I am happy to say that my choice has met with the approval of Miss Pinner, and that she is quite agreed with me that we will have no tomfoolery. We have talked the matter over ; she sitting on the arm of my chair and listening attentively. She says—

“It is not particularly romantic, but it is the proper view to take of the thing. We will put on our oldest clothes, and if it rains I can wear my waterproof and goloshes. Won't it be jolly?”

I don't know that we need actually go to such extremes as these suggested, but I certainly see no occasion to make a mountebank of oneself.

“We will go out as usual without saying a word to any of them,” I say, “and drop in and get it over. Then drop down the river (the steamboat pier is quite close too) and stop, say, a couple of days at Gravesend.”

“Or Greenwich,” says Miss Pinner, “which is nearer, and the fare considerably less.”

“Well, as to that,” I say, gently patting her on the head—upon my soul she is the most thoughtful little woman alive—“we won't consider a trifle of that kind upon such an occasion.”



Before taking any decisive steps in the matter, when I have named the day (Miss Pinner said I had better name it), I go down to Saint Starvus's and reconnoitre. I ascertain that the keys of the church are kept at a shoemaker's in the next street, and find that the shoemaker, who is also clerk and verger, has gone out, and is not expected home for some hours. If, however, it is any business about the church, Mrs. Shoemaker tells

me, I had better see him at the church next day, which is Sunday.



The Verger.

On Sunday I go to Saint Starvus's about half an hour before morning service, and interview the verger. He opens his eyes very widely when I tell him that I require a marriage ceremony as soon as it can conveniently be performed.

He says, "Is the lady your daughter?"

I reply, not without some excusable indignation, "Certainly not, sir. No relation at all."

Presently it dawns on him that it is my own marriage I am speaking of, and he then tells me that he has no doubt but that it will be all right, but there has not been a marriage at Saint Starvus's for more than twenty years.

* * * * *

The preliminary arrangements have been made.

The banns have been put up, and I have reason to believe we have been asked in church on three consecutive Sundays, although I have not been to Saint Starvus's to hear. And now the day has arrived.



It was really a splendid notion of mine. I steal away after breakfast, according to previous arrangement, and rush to the church in a cab, where presently, also by previous arrangement, Miss Pinner is to meet me. I give the cabman a shilling more than his fare. One is not married every day. The cabman pockets it without any outward manifestation of feeling. He *does* drive a cab every day.

I pick my way among the waggons, chuckling (not a soul notices me), and reach the church. On my way I meet the verger, and a youthful curate, laid on for



The Curate.

the occasion, who is to adjust the noose—I mean tie the knot. He seems awestricken on hearing who I am, and shakes hands with me as the Ordinary at Newgate might do on a dissimilar occasion. And here we are at the church—good gracious!

A perfect mob await me on the steps. I am absolutely cheered.

I have a good mind to run away, but how can I do so when I expect Miss Pinner to arrive every moment? Instead, I dash through the mob, and plunging into a high pew, throw myself upon a seat and pant.



Hounded down.

But even here I am not safe from the rabble. They crowd round and point at me, and talk about me as though I were part of a waxworks. Presently some one breathes upon my crown and taps me on the shoulder, and a voice I know says:

"You're an old slyboots, aren't you? We all knew it. We're all here."

It is the Male Dozer. Nobody would believe such a thing; but the Male Dozer is the one regular congregation, and it was his marriage that was the last solemnized at St. Starvus-cum-Bagobonca.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY MARRY HIM.

THE statement made by the Male Dozer is in a measure correct. The greater part of the people from the hotel are already in the church, and, as I glare affrightedly around, half a score of heads nod at me, and imbecile smiles greet me on every side.

I do not smile. On the contrary, my face wears an expression which I trust is sufficient to show that I am far from being gratified by their uncalled-for attendance at what I had intended should be a private wedding.

Meanwhile, what the deuce has become of Miss Pinner?

If by any possible chance Miss Pinner should not—
But, no! I can't entertain an idea so horrible for a moment.

Meanwhile the mob appear to fancy there is a chance of something of the kind occurring, and whisper and giggle a good bit among themselves.

This is rapidly becoming unbearable. What's that?

Cheers! Loud cheers in the lane without! Intense excitement within, and murmurs of "Here she is! Here she is!"

Naturally I go forward to meet her, but as my eyes fall upon her I almost lose my equilibrium. She is not wearing her old clothes. There are no signs of the waterproof, and the goloshes are not there.

On the contrary, she is attired in white. A wreath of orange-blossoms and a long lace veil take the place of the baby bonnet I had wooed and won her in, if I may be pardoned the poetic imagery.

My first feeling is that of indignation—my next of pride. Jemima is unquestionably sweetly pretty thus attired, and you will allow it is a trying dress for the generality of girls.

I may incidentally mention that white hardly suits *the* Girls—Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula—who it would appear are going to be bridesmaids.

"You won't be angry with me," Jemima says in a low tone, hastily. "They had made the dress, and made me put it on. It would have been absurd to make a fuss about it, and besides, I might as well try to do you credit."

She is the most wonderful matter-of-fact little woman on the face of the earth.

"Under the circumstances it must be allowed," I begin to say; but the clerk says—

"Now, sir, please, it's getting' late. Are you quite ready?"



In another five minutes we are half married. In another ten the ceremony is complete, and our names are in the register. Shortly afterwards we are in the street, where the rabble await us. As well as I can make out by one hasty glance around, I am inclined to believe that all the warehousemen in the big buildings within miles have struck work and assembled to see the sight. Fortunately, somebody has got the cab—no, it is a brougham, it seems—close up to the church, several waggons having moved out of the way to give it room; and, as soon as it can be managed, I get Miss—I mean Mrs. Major Penny—into it and follow myself, the mob, meanwhile, cheering tremendously, which they continue to do for the next three or four minutes, whilst our coachman has a verbal row with a carman, just arrived on the scene, and persisting in blocking up the road.



We are free at length, and on our way home to the hotel. There is breakfast waiting for us, it would appear. Speeches, too, most likely. I can't help shuddering a little when I think of it, but Mrs. Major Penny says—

"After all, it won't last for ever. They won't want to spend the honeymoon with us, I suppose!"



The breakfast is over. The wedding-cake—there is

a wedding-cake, if you please—has been cut, with the ordinary attendant ceremonies, and the speeches have set in with severity.



Dozer Male at it.

At the present moment Dozer Male is on his legs. I can't exactly say what he is talking about, and I don't think he exactly knows himself; but he mentions, among other things, that though he has not known me all his life, he never met with a man he was more proud to know. He also adds that his experience of the married state has been satisfactory. He doesn't know what he would have done had he not met with Mrs. Dozer, and all he can say is he hopes Mrs. Dozer's niece will prove a second Mrs. Dozer to his friend and companion in arms, if he may be allowed the expression, Major Penny.



I have replied. I am back in my seat again, with

a strong consciousness of having been confoundedly ridiculous and utterly irrelevant, and now old Pincher is at it about the Bridesmaids.



It is all over!



Pincher : his Tear.

It is absolutely all over at last, and I have shaken hands with Pincher, who wrings mine silently and sheds a tear, and the Girls are all weeping, and about twenty persons of both sexes have kissed Mrs. Major Penny (I don't know how long that sort of thing is expected to go on), and we are in the cab ready to start. Oh!



It's a shoe! Confound such tomfoolery! but I suppose I ought to smile and pretend I rather liked that one on the nose!



Throwing the Slipper.

How long is the ass of a driver going to be before he starts? They'll have our lives, or break a window directly!



CHAPTER IX.

HE HONEYMOONS.

I SHOULD feel much obliged if anybody would kindly inform me why the deuce I (Major Penny) should be expected to know anything about Slocum Podger, either in or out of season.

My acquaintance with Slocum Podger has been of

brief duration, and it shall not, if I have my way, be greatly prolonged.

It would appear that Slocum Podger has a season some time or other, and that this time is not that time.

When I ask the landlady whether there were many visitors at Slocum Podger just now, she says, "No, sir; we're very quiet."

Facts that have subsequently come to light prove Mrs. Major Penny and myself to be the only two.

We sought for a quiet place! We have surely got it then, you say.

Have we? That's all you know!

It has been observed by somebody that there is no solitude like that to be found in a crowd. That man had probably had had his turn of trying to get round a quiet corner at Slocum Podger.

But there is no quiet corner to get round. The eye of Slocum Podger is for ever on you, and it is an eager and a hungry eye.



"Go for a sail, sir?"

The one aim and object of the native of Slocum Podger is to hound you down and take you for a drive or a sail, or urge you on to row yourself, or to sell you new milk from the cow (throwing in the cow as a kind of novel source of milk just discovered), or to thrust shell-pincushions on you; and the last attempt has been that of a blear-eyed boy who has followed us a mile out of the town to sell us a cocoanut.

We take the parlours at the bow-windowed house at the end of the Terrace (which commands a sea-view), and take them at the landlady's own price. I tell her that as an old soldier I like punctuality and regularity. I mention the hour at which I am accustomed to dine, and the hour when I require the breakfast and lunch to be upon the table. I interrogate her respecting the aspect of her house, and finding her vague upon the subject, set her right. I suggest a few alterations in the disposal of the furniture, and



Her Smile.

request that the clock upon the mantelpiece, which is absurdly incorrect, shall be removed; and her presence being no longer required, I mention the fact.

But she does not retire. On the contrary, she falls into a pensive attitude and contemplates us with a bland smile. We might be a play got up for her especial amusement.

With withering irony I ask whether she would not like to take a seat. She takes one.

Perhaps it is as well for all parties that at this moment there is a knock at the street door and she goes to answer it. Some one from the Bazaar and Assembly Rooms who wishes to know if the lady and gentleman will do him the honour to inscribe their names in the visitors' list. I see no particular reason why we should not, and Mrs. Major Penny says, "By all means! You sign for both."

Upon this the landlady supplies pens and ink, and I take a seat at the table and lay the volume out before me. It is a brand-new volume, perfectly empty with the exception of two lines, thus:—

"VISITORS' LIST,"

"ARRIVALS."

Below this I add another line:—

"Major Penny and Mrs. Penny, from London."

Meanwhile the landlady is looking on with a smile of much blandness, and receives the book, still smiling, and carries it away.

As from the bow-window I watch its progress up

the road, I observe that the boy carrying it is suddenly waylaid by a bareheaded man in a white apron, having the appearance of a grocer, who reads the entry eagerly, and whilst he is so engaged other persons, having the appearance of a greengrocer and a butcher, join in excitedly, and then all rush off in opposite directions.

Within an hour cards and circulars requesting the honour of Major Penny's patronage have arrived from the local tradesmen, and, with them in my hand, I go forth to order in provisions, accompanied by Mrs. Major Penny, and watched from the door by the landlady, smiling her hardest. Confound that woman's smiling! I hope it won't go on much longer.

* * * * *

I have nothing particular to urge against Slocum Podger as a bathing-place, only I should be sorry to bathe there myself; nor against it as a pleasure resort, except that as the amusements are limited to an Assembly Room where nobody assembles, but which is, just now, used as a kind of hospital for invalid perambulators and Bath-chairs that have gone wrong, I don't think it can be called too gay. As a poor, paltry, bleak, bare, and barren little place, I give Slocum Podger its due, and willingly testify to its openness and airiness; the latter amounting to small hurricanes enough to blow you clean off your feet.

Possibly this wind may add to the appetite of the natives in these parts, and unusual efforts be rendered necessary to procure the means of appeasing the same, and this also may be the reason why, upon the appear-

ance of the first visitors this season, they are remorselessly hounded down.

I have made the necessary purchases, and the local tradesmen watch us from their premises with pensive sadness. I suppose they thought we were going to empty the whole of the shops.

We haven't been here more than a couple of hours, and we have made a deadly enemy of one mariner, who has a boat to let which we will not hire of him. The person at the Bazaar and Assembly Rooms has come forth upon the threshold, again and again, with a wistful smile, and now as we pass her by, for the sixth time, she looks vindictive. The bleary-eyed boy with the unsold cocoanut (one of last season's, I'll take my oath) has the aspect of an assassin, and moves his white lips as though invoking maledictions. Two ancient mariners, with one telescope between

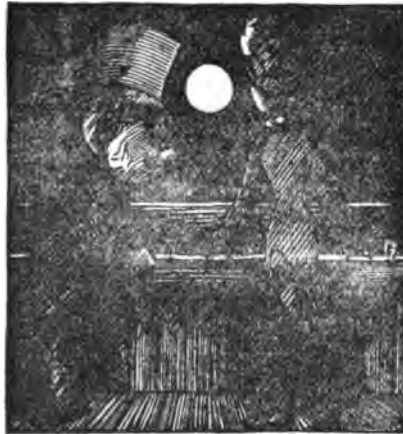


Spotting the Pair.

them, follow us steadily for over an hour, and, at intervals, offer the loan of the telescope, putting forth

fresh arguments, each time, to prove that not to borrow their telescope (for the price of a pint) and spot uninteresting objects far away, is to miss the one aim and object a reasonable being cares to go on living for.

We have had our dinner to a smiling accompaniment from the landlady, who never leaves us, and now in the moonlight we have wandered out upon the pier, and are, for the first time, alone, on this the evening of the day of our wedding.



Blessed calm at last.

The natives retire early at Slocum Podger, it would seem, and the town lies silently in the pale moonlight afar off, a tiny light twinkling here and there in the upper windows.

Nothing but the faint plashing of the waves against the green and time-worn woodwork below us, breaks

the sweet calm. Nothing else but—a pair of heavy boots approaching from the distance.

The boots draw nearer. Their owner comes in sight, reaches us, and pulls up short.

He is the owner of a fishing-smack, and is going fishing by moonlight. It is now nearly eleven. He proposes to remain fishing till five in the morning, and he came out of his way up the pier because it occurred to him we should like to be of the party, and pay him half a crown for the privilege.



CHAPTER X.

SHE IS PRACTICAL.

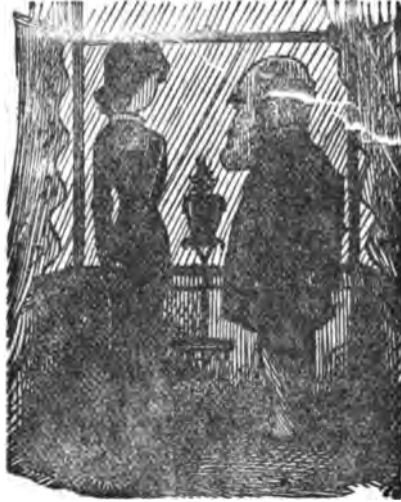
It is possible that under conditions even less favourable than one's honeymoon Slocum Podger might be found endurable—as long as it didn't rain.

It may be urged by the unreflective that a wet day can make but little difference to a couple honeymooning. That shows what the unreflective know about it!



It is raining hard just now at Slocum Podger.





It rains.

From the bow-window of my parlour I can see far away to the right and to the left, up and down the long, straggling, one-sided street which forms the centre of traffic and commerce of Slocum Podger, and, with the exception of somebody in a white apron, peeping timidly from a shop door (doubtless the shop-keeper, who has nothing else to do), there is no sign of life.

Stay! there is a stray dog a long way off in the opposite direction. A dog of wobegone aspect sitting shivering under the shelter of the sea-wall, and hanging down his head as though in thought.

The rain falls steadily, swelling the puddles in the middle of the road, drifting with a dreary sound against the window-panes. A water-pipe close by,

communicating with the roof of the house, keeps up a constant dribble, which is a dismal thing to listen to for long at a time.

Mrs. Penny has brought down some needlework. It is a blue cloth petticoat, and she is sewing a button on it with a businesslike air.

I cannot exactly say why, but this act on the part of Mrs. Penny, on the third day after our wedding, strikes me as singularly unsentimental.

I don't say so, however. I only say, "Busy, eh?"

She says, "I must do something," and threads a needle.

I take a seat upon the sofa by her side. She moves an inch or two, possibly to make room for me, only there is plenty of room. I take the hem of the petticoat in my hand, and she pulls it very gently, but hard enough to pull it away, and says, "You mustn't touch."

Then we sit silently for a time, and then I put my arm round her waist, on which she gives my hand a prick with her needle—a good sharp prick, which makes me cry "Oh!"

On which she says, "I hope I didn't hurt you." On which I say, "No; it's nothing!" feeling bound to treat the matter thus, though it aches for an hour afterwards.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Penny goes on sewing on the button, after having placed her work-basket between us; and I go on looking on at a respectful distance, and the rain goes on raining, and, altogether, it is not quite as gay as it might be.



The question is, when it is raining at Slocum Podger, how do lodgers, who do not happen to be honeymooning, spend their time? Supposing now, for instance, that I were an old married man—I mean, of course, a man who had been married some time—what should I do at the present moment? The answer naturally occurs to one.

Seize an umbrella, and at all risks seek the parlour of the nearest inn. But, under present circumstances, that would hardly be the proper thing to do. Let me rather turn my attention to indoor occupations of a recreative character. What is there, now?

I don't like to propose scratch-cradle, as I somehow fancy Mrs. Penny would think it frivolous.

Thank goodness! Lunch!



It is my firm impression, though, I do not care to mention it to Mrs. Penny (on the third day of one's honeymoon one scarcely wishes to go into these kind of details), that that Cheshire cat of a landlady calmly helps herself to our food in the most barefaced fashion; though she has gone out of her way to provide us with keys which are supposed to lock everything up, safe and sound.

A case in point is the fresh butter. To say that this fragment of a quarter-pound in any way resembles the quarter-pound scarcely touched that left our breakfast-table is simply preposterous; but it would, most assuredly, be so said, and sworn to for that matter, were I to speak to the landlady about it.

And with a bland smile, too, that would add insult

to the injury. What that woman can see to grin at is a thing I have frequently asked myself in vain. Possibly from some point of view my aspect as the husband of Mrs. Penny may present itself in a ridiculous light to this woman, but I confess I don't see it, and, what is more certain still, I certainly don't like this grinning.

Upon one thing I am, however, quite determined. I will prove the dishonesty of this landlady beyond doubt, and I will—if I may be pardoned the phrase, which I admit has somewhat of a melodramatic turn—**fling it in her teeth!**



The Major makes his mind up.

The process necessary is a simple one. With an ordinary pin, such as you get a row of instead of the odd farthing at linendrapers' shops, a secret mark shall be made upon the side of the butter that has been cut. If when the butter is again brought forth from its

cupboard the secret mark is still there, it is to be supposed that a robbery has not been committed. We shall see!

After lunch, whilst Mrs. Penny is putting on her bonnet (it has left off raining a little, and we have determined to get as far as the Bazaar, if we can possibly manage it), I mark the butter, and, locking the cupboard, deposit the key in a hiding-place known only to myself.

* * * * *

We have been to the Bazaar, and stopped there as long as we decently could (it came on raining again directly we crossed the threshold), and have come back, and I have sought the nearest inn alone, with the intention of tasting their sherry and bitters before dinner.

* * * * *

The nearest inn is a paltry place, and the sherry and bitters well worthy of it. I have come back again now, and am waiting for dinner.

* * * * *

Here it is at last, and here is the butter! Now, upon my word this really beats anything I ever came across!

Not only has a great lump of butter disappeared, but I'll be hanged if there are not a lot of pin-marks all over it, apparently imitations, or I might call them gross caricatures, of those I made.

Naturally I can't stand this, and I give the bell a great pull. The landlady is dishing up the dinner and sends up the girl. In a voice of thunder I demand to

know who has been at the butter, and she says she doesn't know, but will inquire.



“I'll ask missus.”

Whilst she has gone to do so, Mrs. Penny comes down, and asks what is the matter.

“Nothing, my dear,” I reply, “but it is really too disgraceful!”

‘Have they been at it again?’ she inquires.

‘At what?’ I ask, supposing, of course, she does not know what I am referring to.

“No,” she continues, without waiting for my reply, “the marks are just as I left them. It's all right.”

“Have you too marked the butter, then?” I gasp.

“Yes,” she says; “I had a bit of bread and butter when you were out, and marked it afterwards.”

“But I had the key.”

“Oh, I found that.”





More artfulness.

Surely there are times, upon the **Ensanguined Field** and elsewhere, when even those among us who are possessed of the readiest flow of language may lack words with which to give expression to sentiments that seem to fill the labouring breast to overflowing.

Is it possible for a woman to be too practical, I wonder? It seems to jar on one, this notion of marking the butter on the third day of a honeymoon.



Here's the landlady now, and *not* grinning this time. She looks very serious, and wants to know what I mean.



CHAPTER XI

THEY RETURN

HANG this butter business!

There is nothing at all of a buttery expression, so to speak, about the landlady's face as she asks me what is the matter, and whether I have anything to complain of.

By a happy inspiration, as I don't happen to be in a position to complain, I resolve upon laying the blame on the girl, and pretend that she did not understand what I said. Poor girl! but it can't be helped.

The landlady says, "I suppose the housekeeping comes strange to you at first, Major? You ought to leave it to your good lady. Oughtn't he, ma'am?"

This is a kind of woman you cannot quell with an imperious glance. On the contrary, she laughs if you fix her, and, as likely as not, gives you a nudge if you don't see the joke quickly enough.

No one would credit what a nuisance this woman's perpetual grinning has become, and how persistently she keeps it up. If, for instance, I diffidently go marketing and buy a chicken, which may be a trifle skinnier than could be desired, she will ask, "What might you have given for that now, sir?" and on my telling her, she will say, "That's all a chicken, that is!" and sit down and hold her sides and laugh for five minutes.

Again, if I sally forth and return triumphantly, followed by a boy carrying an uncommonly fine cabbage

in a basket, her mirth is unbounded. She gathers up the cabbage, weighs it in both hands, bangs it down, and cries out loud enough for the whole street to hear, "Well, I'm sure! If this ain't a cabbage, and no mistake. Took two on you to bring it home, and no wonder!"

To sum this woman up, she is perpetually, everlastingly on the giggle, and watches my every movement in a way that is beyond measure exasperating—to such an extent, indeed, that knowing, when approaching the house and yet afar off, she is lying in wait for me behind a curtain, I feel for all the world as though I were making my *début* at a Theatre Royal, with the critics assembled in front, and have to take care my toes are properly turned out, and that my arms are swinging easily, which I am conscious they are not, and I'll be hanged if I can help it.

In point of fact, I don't care how soon the week is over and we get back to town, where possibly we may be left to ourselves and not worried quite so much.

* * * * *

Meanwhile the final arrangements relative to the furnishing of the semi-detached villa (Plantagenet House, Little Battle of Bosworth Field Road East, Upper Straggleton, S.W.) are progressing rapidly. The Girls, acting under my instructions (I have laid in a couple of dozen post-cards, and drop one into the box whenever anything occurs to me), are seeing to the details, and the result, if my directions are properly carried out, will be calculated to surprise.

● ● ● ● ● ●

Thank goodness the week has actually come to an end, and we leave this very day!

On asking for my bill, Mrs. Cheshire Cat says, "You *do* make me laugh, sir."

I reply sarcastically, "Some people possibly see more to laugh at than other people?"

"Yes," she says, "if they let lodgings. Oh, my! you *are* a funny one!" and then she nearly goes into hysterics.

It is really hardly worth noticing a woman of this kind, so I merely tell her I should like the bill at her earliest convenience, and as she has taken a seat in my parlour to have her laugh out, I put on my hat and go for a walk till she has had it.

* * * * *

We are packed up, and the bill is paid. I must confess that on auditing the same I was almost disappointed at not being able to question any of the items, and Mrs. Cheshire receiving payment passes over the odd sixpence in the total with "Never mind that, sir! I'm sure it's done me several sixpences-worth of good, and that's the truth. He! he! ha! ha! ha! Oh! my poor side!" etc.—*ad nauseam*.

* * * * *

We are actually off. The fly is here. The Cheshire is on the doorstep grinning harder than ever. And what at? I ask you as calmly as I can, "What at?"

* * * * *

We have quitted Slocum Podger.

To the best of my belief, the greater part of the inhabitants assembled to see us out of the town, and appeared, if anything, much more pleased we are going than they were when we arrived. The boy with the cocoanut (the cocoanut still on him, as well as I can see, yet unsold) beaming in the background.

"Thank goodness that's over," I say, with a sigh of relief, as the train starts.

"Yes," says Mrs. Penny.

* * * * *

In town at last. In the cab. On the way to Upper Straggleton, a rising suburb with pretensions; only up to now rather unfinished and a trifle damp.

At Upper Straggleton. In the Battle of Bosworth Field Road. In front of Plantagenet House.

"Hullo! there they are! That's him! That's her! Hooray!"

A tumultuous welcome awaits us.

The Girls are there upon the doorstep in a row.

So are the Twins!

Deuce take those Twins. It is not holiday-time. What does it mean?

"What are those?" asks Mrs. Penny, indicating the Twopenny division with a forefinger ruthlessly pointed thereat.

I don't believe I ever—indeed, on reflection, I am quite certain—I never yet have properly explained the Twins' existence.

This is, to put it mildly, rather lively.

CHAPTER XII.

HE HAS A TIME OF IT.

THE Girls are drawn up in a row to receive us, and the Twins are all over the place, going on tumultuously. Mrs. Penny does not appear to be too delighted to find the Girls in a row, and is even less pleased by the Twins' demonstration.

I hastily explain that the Twins are of no consequence, only being nephews, and not in any way attached to the establishment; being rather, if anything, a portion of a Welcoming Ceremony that might, under other circumstances, have had a backing-up of arches and flags with appropriate devices, and fire-arms at intervals.

She says, "They are very like you."

As a matter of fact, they do not resemble me in the least, and nothing could well annoy me more than their presence; but I hardly see why I should be hunted into a corner, as it were, upon the subject.

As we approach the door the Girls cluster round and clutch at Mrs. Penny, who, it seems to me, bobs her head systematically, and passes, so to speak, unscathed through the ordeal, whilst the Girls (in a row) rub their noses where Mrs. Penny's bonnet and feather have caught them right and left, and blink and smile, tearfully.

Meanwhile, however, the Twins have been watching their opportunity, and close with Mrs. Penny, at

whom from a polished hall chair (they don't mind the polish a bit) they take flying leaps and kiss with fury.

I say sternly, "Boys, behave yourselves!"

Instead of doing so they charge me impetuously—so that half my time I am uncertain whether I am standing on my head or my heels—and yell in chorus, "Brayvo, Nunky! Gi' us a shillin'!



Sportiveness.

"Good boys," I say, feeling as though I should like to smack their heads for them, but, at the same time, conscious of their meaning well, though not quite knowing how to express themselves. "Keep quiet for a moment, and I——"

Here one Twin butts at me with his head in a lower waistcoat button, whilst the other charges me from the rear. "Good boys, that'll do!"

"That's new auntie, ain't it?" they shout in chorus (they're always in chorus, it seems to me). "Gi' us a kiss, new auntie."

"Go away! do!" responds new auntie.

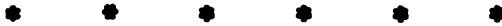
"Go away. Leave go of your aunt!" I thunder. On which they beat a retreat of a yard or two and cheer.

The Girls, still rubbing their noses, form a tearful little procession to the parlour, and Bathsheba, the eldest, says, "Welcome home!"

The little parlour is brand new and awfully prim, and the chairs set round the walls give it much of the appearance of the first class ladies' waiting-room at a small railway station. The crowd lends itself to this fancy, and our carpet bags heighten the effect.

The room, indeed, is very crowded by the three Girls, Mrs. Penny, myself, and the servant, without counting the Twins, who jostle each other fiercely in the doorway.

If somebody would only get out of the way! I feel as though I should like to take a chair.



We have had tea and ham and eggs. The Girls decided that this would be preferable to dinner after our journey. I don't know why it should be, but we have it, and say it is very nice. Meanwhile the Twins have a game in the room overhead, which threatens every now and then to bring down the chandelier.

I break it mildly to the Girls that we could have done without the Twins upon an occasion like this, and ask when they are going. At this Cassandra's feelings (it was her notion, it appears) are hurt, and she says, "Brother, if I had only known, I would not have suggested it. But it is natural you should be changed now."

I say, "I don't know about changed, but they make such a confounded row."

Cassandra says, "You would not have thought so once, Brother."

I don't argue the point, but go to look at my Bradshaw for the next train that will take the Twins back to their school, which is about twenty miles off.

In the passage I find them waiting for me, and they shout in chorus—

"Nunky, come and look at the back garding."

I am on the point of telling them I haven't time, when they suddenly seize on me, one on each side, and absolutely run me out, and down one gravel walk and half up another before I can shake myself free. Then, asking them how they dare, I turn upon my heel and retrace my steps to the house. Turning suddenly at the door, however, I discover that they have been following in Indian file, as it is called, taking what is



Want of Respect.

commonly known as a "Snook" behind me. (*Vide illustration.*) On which I shake my fist at them, and



The Threat.

they take more "snooks" and dance *can-can* steps of a derisive character.



The Defiant Attitude.

Feeling that such conduct calls for immediate action on my part, I make a dash, and vainly endeavour to grapple with an illusive Twin, who escapes across the

centre flower-bed and dodges me round a laurel ; whilst the other Twin harasses me from the rear, and calls out "Yah !"

In the midst of this, casting my eyes towards our back parlour window, I observe Mrs. Penny looking on with a placid smile, and I, at the same moment, become conscious of the neighbours' heads at the windows of the adjoining houses.

The neighbours also appear to be much amused.

I am glad they are.

I am also glad Mrs. Penny is amused.

But I *don't* intend to go on making an exhibition of myself to please anybody.

* * * * *

I have given up this unseemly struggle, and am looking for the train in the Bradshaw.

There is not another to-night.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE SHOWS THE WAY.

It is next morning.

The last thing overnight the rain came pouring down in torrents, and as there are never any cabs to be had in this rising suburb when the weather is at all

unfavourable, I was obliged to ask the Girls to stop and sleep.

My roof also sheltered the Twins, but I have no reason for supposing that *they* slept. As the church clock just at the back of us struck two (about as loud as Big Ben, heard as from the top of Westminster Abbey—we shall have no occasion for a clock of our own), the merry game of Bolsters was at its height. As the quarter chimed I was returning breathless from the scene of conflict with what was left of the bolsters.



It is next morning. The Girls have taken charge of the Twins, and all the five have left the premises. I have opened all the windows, and Clarissa, the servant the Girls engaged for us, is brushing up crumbs.

I presume it would be premature to form any decided judgment respecting Clarissa's capabilities, and hasty of me, at this moment, to rush at the conclusion that the Girls engaged her solely upon account of her name, which certainly stands out strongly against Jemima, the simple appellation belonging to Mrs. Penny.

Clarissa (she tells me that at home they call her "Issa for short") is a willing girl, with a temper not easily ruffled, and she says she will be glad to learn anything. At the present moment she knows nothing whatever, so there is, seemingly, a chance for any one, with some spare time on his hands, to bring that girl up in the way she should go.

She also adds that when she gets used to our ways **things will come easier.** Meanwhile she has been an

hour and a quarter brushing up crumbs, which when brushed up she deposits in the dust-shovel on the hall table, and I knock them down and scatter them again, whilst tightening an adjacent hat-peg.

When I have got the majority of them together (I confess that, finding the exertion of stooping a little disagreeable, after a time I hustled a certain portion of the crumbs into a corner, and covered them over with a mat), I call to Clarissa and reason with her gently on slovenliness, as a vice that should be grappled with in good time, and not allowed to become a part of her nature.

I then show her the purposes to which the hand-brush and long broom are usually applied, and tell her to be sure and miss no corners. On this she makes a dash at the corner where the crumbs are hidden, and I have only time to seize a feather-brush and drag her towards the parlour to prevent her finding it all out. Naturally somewhat nervous for the moment, I take a rather broader sweep with the feather-brush than is necessary to bring down a cobweb which I am drawing Clarissa's attention to ; and having my back turned towards the spot at the time, whilst I am addressing Clarissa, I give a plaster bust of myself, perched upon the top of the bookcase, a smart slap on the ear, and bring it crashing to the ground.

It must be recorded to Clarissa's credit that this incident, which I own has a ridiculous side to it that might have been taken hold of, is not so used, but Clarissa, in solemn silence, stoops down and picks up the bits.

Mrs. Penny, attracted by the noise, also appears

upon the scene at the moment when Clarissa is endeavouring to stick my (plaster) nose on again, the wrong end up, and contemplates the catastrophe with considerable serenity.

I confess that there are times when I do not quite understand Mrs. Penny; and, for instance, at the present moment, I feel that, in her place, she might manifest more excitement, when she sees the property all going to wrack and ruin. I therefore say, "Here's a nice piece of business!"

"Dreadful!" she responds, without the least emphasis. "Which of you did it?"

"Well, as to that," I respond, somewhat impatiently, because I don't see that that is exactly the point at issue—"I did!"

"Oh," she responds, "that was so like you, too."

"Like me!" I say, rather uneasily.

"But perhaps it is not beyond mending still," she continues. "We must try some cement, or perhaps putty would do. Isn't there a bit of the nose end missing?"

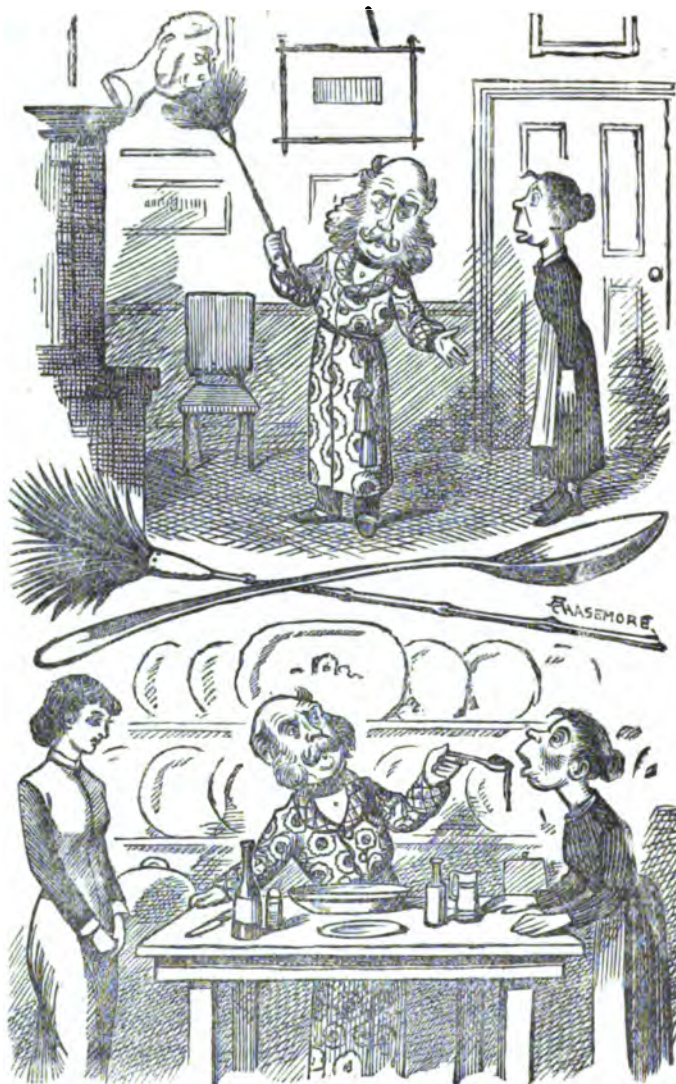
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Clarissa is no cook.

We have had specimens of Clarissa three days running. A joint and a hash and a meat pie have been prepared by Clarissa, and at the present moment I am undecided which was spoilt the most.

Under these circumstances I feel that, if I do not take the matter in hand, we shall soon be reduced to a diet of bread and cheese or sea-biscuits.

In my campaigning days at the Crimea, upon the tented field, my proficiency in the cooking art was the



The Major shows how things should be dusted, and which is the correct way to make a Chokerblacker (as eaten in India).

theme of general conversation, and, on more than one occasion, it was suggested that I and the late Alexis Soyer might advantageously change places, and Soyer go to the front.

Whilst in India, also, it may be mentioned, my preparation of the famous dish, commonly known as *chokerblacker*, was the talk of the army. Why should we not try a *chokerblacker* to-day?

I do not pretend to say that this *chokerblacker* will be quite exactly right, because certain ingredients are necessary for the concoction of the perfect *chokerblacker* which are only to be procured in India itself, and certain herbs should be put into it which are of no use whatever unless fresh gathered.

The things that can be bought in London I set about purchasing, and find that the shops where they are sold are rather scattered, and that the things themselves all come to money. The entire purchases reached the sum of one pound fifteen, and with cab fare and train we arrive at a total of forty shillings; but then, of course, all will not be used up in one dish; we shall have a good stock in hand.

The ceremonies attendant on *chokerblacker* manufacture are elaborate, and Mrs. Penny likens them to an incantation; but it is in every way a success. The only thing wanting, indeed, being a couple of teaspoonsful of the Penny Sauce—a composition of my own invention, and named after me, of which I have just one bottle left, packed up and brought from my old home by the Girls.

Owing to an accidental jog of the elbow, I put in two table-spoonsful of Penny instead of the proper

quantity, but, after all, one can't have too much of a good thing, and now on goes the saucepan.



Repeater in hand, I watch the pot boil, and then pour the contents out in a dish.

"There!" I cry triumphantly, handing Clarissa a large spoonful to taste. "That's cookery, if you like!"

"Do you think this bottle with the Penny Sauce label is all right?" says Mrs. P., a moment later. "Did you notice some one has struck out the words, and written 'Embrocation' underneath?"

Confound those Girls!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLOTS AND PLANS.

IT may, possibly, be remembered, by those who read these chapters carefully, that an allusion was made in the last chapter but one to a laurel in the back garden.

The article *a* was a mistake on the part of the printer: it should have been *the* laurel. There is only one of him, and he is partially blighted, but is looking up a bit under a regimen prescribed by me (Major Penny), and carried out under my superintendence by Clarissa, the domestic.

As the laurel now stands all by itself, and very much on one side, its appearance is scarcely what could be desired ; but if surrounded by rockwork, and led up to by a serpentine path of bright red gravel, I have every reason to believe it will form a striking ornament, and it will be a pleasant thing to look out at from my library window during intervals of leisure snatched from hours of mental toil.



Upon the idea first occurring to me, I go forth into the garden, take my stand before the laurel, and fix it with my eye ; I then call forth Clarissa, who comes out with a long broom and a dust-shovel, and I send her back with the long broom and dust-shovel, and instruct her to fetch the ball of string.

I then instruct her to hold tight by the ball whilst I walk away, holding an end of the string, which, as I walk, will unroll itself and enable me to take measurements. She, however, maintains such a resolute grip on the ball that, at the end of the first three paces, the end of the string is jerked sharply away from me, and I am left clutching at it wildly after the manner of Macbeth and the dagger.

Upon this I instruct Clarissa to let the string go more easily, and begin again, and take half a dozen paces, at the end of which the ball flies out of her hands altogether and runs away down the gravel walk, only to be captured by unseemly scrambling.

For the third time, however, I make a fair start, and get twelve or thirteen paces off, when the string suddenly parts company with the ball, owing to a short

length having been added to the main string, and we then essay with varying success several experiments that occur to me, during the course of which, at one period, Clarissa's ankles became so entangled that, called upon suddenly to advance, she does so hopping, not having previously liked to mention what a knot she was getting into.

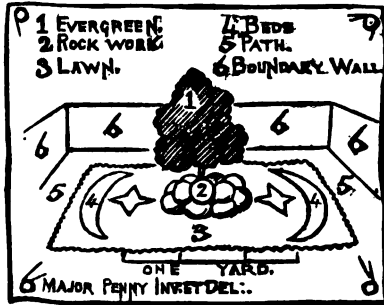
The neighbours are much amused by these proceedings.

* * * * *

On the whole, I am inclined to think that measuring is all foolery. The best thing to do is to draw a plan, and have a man in to carry it out.

* * * * *

I have drawn a plan. It took me some time to find a shop in the neighbourhood whereat I could purchase



The plan.

the necessary materials ; but it has been done, and the plan is drawn and coloured.

Mrs. Penny says it is colossal. Clarissa holds it upside-down, and seems to think it is intended for a valentine. She asks whether it will go by post.

* * * * *

I have, after considerable trouble, found a man who knows all about what he calls "landscape gardening," and I have got him to come and landscape garden our



The Landscape Gardener.

back, as a personal favour, because it is not worth his while to do odd jobs.

He can't come any one of the days I name this week or next, but he looks in one evening at twilight, to get (as he puts it) what is wanted into his head, and he says it is a pity we can't pull the party walls down.

I say I am afraid the tenants on either side might not like that, even if their landlords did not object.

He says, "We shan't be able to make much of a job



of it," he is afraid, and goes away shaking his head despondently.

Three days later I wake up about five, and hear the sound of a pick in the back garden. It is the landscape gardener, who has come early and rung up Clarissa. By the time I reach the field of action he has cut down the laurel.

* * * * *

We have had a word or two, and I have shown him the plan, and explained that I desired the laurel to be removed only, and not levelled with the earth. He says I ought to have mentioned it before. I ask whether he can supply me with another laurel, and he says it is not the proper time to plant them, but we can but try. "It *may* grow," he says; "there is no knowing."

I then ask whether he has got the rockwork?

He says, "Oh, you want rockwork, do you? I shall have to see to that. It's not the right time of year to buy rockwork."

I say, sarcastically, "It may grow, though, perhaps; there's no knowing."

He doesn't notice the sarcasm. He says, "Do you mean stonecrop?" but I don't think it worth while to pursue the subject.

* * * * *

Two days have elapsed. The landscape gardener has not been near since. He is either offended, or can't find any rockwork.

* * * * *

This is the third day, and here he is again—at half-past four this time.

I like a man to begin his day early, even if he does wake up all the rest of the world doing so.

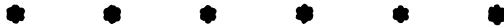
He has brought a plant to take the place of the laurel, which he is going to let me have cheap, and the rockwork is to follow. It does follow shortly after-



The Rockwork.

wards, and the landscape gardener and two of his mates, aided by me and Clarissa, carry it through the passage into the garden, where it is piled up carefully in one place, previous to its being removed to another, until a third is got ready for it.

Then the landscaper and his mates go away for hours, and I pass the time in a feverish way, looking down at the rocks and up the road to see whether any of them are coming back.



It is the afternoon of another day, and the landscape gardener has returned, the worse for liquor. He also looks down at the rocks—as it seems to me, contemptuously. He says they are not the right sort, and no up to much. He also says it is the act of an ass to try on such a thing in such a limited space. He says give him four acres and he is all there. He adds that you couldn't fight the Battle of Waterloo on the boiler-lid.

He has gone away again (for more beer, I think), and left the plan open on the rocks. It has come on to rain, and the plan is getting wet through.

I go forth to fetch it in, and find a corner torn off, to light a pipe with, as is proved by the half-charred remains screwed up and thrown aside.

This is scarcely respectful.

And here comes the landscaper back again. I will speak my mind to him on the subject. I have. He has laughed.



The Act of Defiance.

I have asked him how he dared. He is sitting on the rocks. He is very drunk. He is asking me to come on, if I am man enough.

Shall I do it? I (Major Penny) who on the Enslanguined Field—

No, 't is beneath me. And even Mrs. Penny allows that she has no doubt that—

CHAPTER XV.

SHE ASKS QUESTIONS.

CLARISSA says the boiler won't act, and she thinks it's because there is something wrong with the ballcock in the cistern.

Mrs. Penny, who is reading the Police part of the newspaper, lays it down, and asks if I feel myself equal to the occasion.

I must confess that there are times when I really do not feel quite certain how to take Mrs. Penny's observations, which—as, for instance, on the present occasion, if I did not know for a fact that there were not the slightest grounds for such a supposition—I should be half inclined to fancy reflected on my management of, say, such matters as the kitchen boiler and the internal organization of the cistern that supplies it.

Laying down my half of the newspaper (the Eastern Question and leaders), I say quietly, "I will first endeavour to ascertain what is the matter."

Mrs. Penny says, "Won't you take off your dressing-gown } and perhaps if you were to put on one of Clarissa's aprons?"

I ignore the second suggestion, and descending to the front kitchen, request Clarissa to oblige me with a lighted candle, and, holding it in one hand, lead the way to the scullery where the cistern is, Mrs. Penny humming to herself, though seemingly unconscious that there is anything *à propos* in it, "See the Conquering Hero comes."

The first question that occurs to me on contemplating the cistern from the spot where I am now standing is, How am I to get up to it?

We do not happen to have such a thing as a step-ladder in our possession, but if I can get upon the sink it is possible I may be able to look over the top. It is, however, difficult to calculate from the spot where I am now standing. Now for the sink.

* * * * *

It is a very difficult thing to calculate heights by the eye, and that sink was rather higher than I had expected when I raised my right foot. However, I have done it somehow. Although still considerably short of the top of the cistern, I am, as it were, upon the way.

Mrs. Penny says, "Pray don't over-exert yourself."

An idea occurs to me. There are two pails in a corner of the kitchen. These combined, that is to say,

one placed on the top of the other, will tend to lessen the distance. I will try.



I have. It's awfully tottery, and requires much of the skill of a Blondin to grapple with successfully.

Mrs. Penny says, "Don't tumble down."

I am at the present moment, with the aid of the lighted candle, making a careful inspection of the interior of the cistern, and I am willing to admit that, as far it has gone (I have been at it about ten minutes), the results of my inspection are scarcely satisfactory. In all probability had I earlier in life directed my attention to the matter, I might have known more, by the mere external appearance of the machinery, as to whether it was in working order; but as it is I am willing to allow (to myself) that there may be something wrong, and in all probability there is, but I'll be hanged if I can see what.

Mrs. Penny says, "Do you think you ought to call in a general practitioner in the usual way, and ask him to bring some tools and things?"

I don't like saying anything rude to Mrs. Penny, particularly before the girl, but I think it absolutely necessary that I should, at least, gently intimate that if she went back upstairs and left me alone, I could get on better. On this Mrs. Penny departs blithely, and is presently heard playing "Rule Britannia" on the piano in the front parlour.

Left to myself, I feel that my reputation is, to a certain extent, at stake, and that I *must* do something, whatever the result may be.



The Major showing the way it is done.

Under these circumstances I seize upon the un-offending ball-cock and wrench it violently. At the same moment the pails give way, and though, happily, able to break my fall somewhat by clutching at a leaden pipe, I assume a sitting posture in the middle of the wet sink.

The deafening clatter of the pails and the piercing shriek of Clarissa, who, at the same time, falls off a chair and drops the tin candlestick, bring Mrs. Penny, breathless, upon the scene, to know whether I have broken any bones.

Although I have bumped myself rather severely, this appears to me hardly the proper moment to say so, and I reply loftily that no bones are broken. On which Mrs. Penny, who appears determined to know, says, "Turn round and let me see."

* * * * *

Next morning! I awake with sensations similar to those which, I presume, are felt by a wrestler who has had several heavy falls on the previous day. It is very early, but some one is hammering at my bed-room door. It is Clarissa. She says, "Please, sir, do come down, the kitching's full o' water, an' your boots is sunk, an' I can't fish 'em up agin."

* * * * *

It is no good alarming Mrs. Penny. I descend hastily in scanty attire, and fall to with a pail baling. Clarissa bales also. Meanwhile the flood rises.

After an hour or so we hear footsteps on the stairs, and Mrs. Penny appears, and very placidly inquires what we are doing?

This is really childish of Mrs. Penny. I myself don't condescend to reply, but Clarissa says, "We're busy, mum, ain't us?" and pausing a moment to glance towards where I am standing knee-deep in water, presenting only a back view, from their point of observation, she bursts out laughing, and adds "Look at master, mum! Don't he look funny?"

CHAPTER XVI.

HE IS VIOLENT.

MIGHTY are the changes that have been wrought within the last half-century among what were once green lanes and flowery meads in the peaceful suburbs of this great metropolis! Battle of Bosworth Field Road was in my childhood's days a pleasant green, and the site of my residence, Plantagenet Villa, a pond that frogs were fond of.

This circumstance (the existence of the pond, I mean, not the fondness for it in the frogs) may in some measure account for the dampness of our cellar, and the way the small coal hisses when put upon the parlour fire.

I may, perhaps, here be permitted to add that I

only recently recollected the pond, or I might not have taken this house for three years certain.

A portion of the pleasant green—about four square yards of it—still lingers, and, though not as green as could be desired, is yet withal something to look out upon from the front windows.

An ancient man, who daily takes a walk up Bosworth Field Road, and is good enough to use the garden wall in front of Plantagenet Villa to rest himself on, has told me I would hardly know that green as it was, to see it now. He says, "It were a hazyish place, it lay so low. I mind the time there was low fever here mostly al'ays."

This is brisk, when I've got the house for three years, as I previously stated. It's good of him to tell me, though (and he has done so every other day in almost exactly the same words), because it's a useful thing to know, and he means well, I'm sure.

Yet, though he does mean well, I wish he would give somebody else's garden wall a turn, by way of a change, and if he must sit on my garden wall, I wish to goodness he wouldn't encourage that confounded Gander.

The confounded Gander I refer to is the Gander of Gander Green also referred to at some length in the parish archives.

It would appear that the four square yards are all that remain of the Gander Green in question, and the Gander aforesaid is the last of his race, and is supported in a sort of way (when anybody recollects it) by the parish, in pursuance of certain instructions left by an old lady deceased some time ago, who bequeathed



The Gander.

a sum of money to the parish, with the stipulation that her flock of geese should be taken care of and fed regularly, and allowed to die of old age.

The Gander at that time was but a gosling, and he is now considerably past his prime. A series of fatalities have deprived him of his wives and the Green he loved them on, and he goes about a sad and sorrowful Gander, looking for both in the front gardens of the villas of Battle of Bosworth Field Road, when you leave your gates open, and nibbles, in an absent-minded way, at your pansies and your London pride.

I confess I have not, hitherto, thought it worth my while to direct my attention to the feeding of geese or ganders, and, possibly, London pride and pansies may be their proper diet; but I wish it to be distinctly understood those flowers were not planted in my front garden for that purpose. Futhermore, I desire it to be known that even though this Gander, which being a privileged Gander, may have a kind of *droit du Seig-*



"Go away, sir, immediately."

near over my London pride and pansies, I don't see what right he has to steal a carrot from a garden opposite, and bring the stolen property into my garden to eat, and, what's more, I won't stand it.

At this present moment he is immovable in the centre path of my front garden with the carrot in question, and is treating my indignant remonstrances with contempt.

Naturally incensed, I sally forth and open the garden gate to its full width, previous to resorting to desperate measures. In the meanwhile the Gander walks quietly through the side door into the back garden.

I follow him, and cry "S—shoo!" but he is still indifferent. I advance and charge him, on which he hisses, and there is an evil look in his eye. Upon this for a moment I lose my self-command, and, grasping a lump of rock, hurl it, vengefully, at his head.

**Rage and fury.**

Good heavens!

This is an awful business! My first instinct was to glance towards the neighbours' windows. For a wonder they are not, as usual, full of heads. No one seems to be looking—no one has been a witness of the deed!

What is to be done? It will require consideration; but the first thing, evidently, is to conceal the body among the rockwork.

It is concealed, and now for a walk. I would be by myself, and collect my thoughts.

* * * * *

I have been for the walk, and return to dinner in a feverish condition, with my plans still immature. I have been reflecting about the business, and I am inclined to think that something very unpleasant—something very serious may come of it. It is not as though the Gander were ordinary private property. There will doubtless be an inquiry—a coroner's inquiry for what I know, and I shall have to explain.



Remorse.

What's that?

I am upon the threshold of my house, and my hand is on the knocker, when a strange perfume assails my nostrils. There is no mistaking that smell. It is roast goose! What madness of Mrs. Penny to do this! The whole parish will now know the truth!



CHAPTER XVII.

THEY WANT HIM.

I **MUST** confess that there are moments—yes, there really *are* moments—when, in a figurative sense, I scarcely follow Mrs. Penny. The present moment is one of them.

Naturally, with a murdered goose upon my con-

science, and, for what I know, a hue and cry all over the country-side, extreme caution is absolutely necessary. No sooner, therefore, do I get the street door open than I rush into the parlour and exclaim, "Good heavens! Mrs. Penny, how could you perpetrate such an insane act of folly?" Happening just then to drop my eye upon Clarissa, who, open-mouthed, fills up the background, I add, suddenly, "Chut!"

Mrs. Penny says, "What ever is the matter?"

Once more I add, "Chut!" with even more significance. "What's 'Chut'?" asks Mrs. Penny. I say in a whisper, which I own might be audible some distance off, such as out in the back yard, for instance "That girl—that wretched girl—Clarissa!"

Mrs. Penny, out loud (out loud, if you please!) asks in reply, "What has she done?"

"Chut!" I cry again, "chut! Listening! Don't you understand?"

Here Clarissa breaks in with, "I'm sure I wasn't. I'd scorn the action. What's master always want to be settin' on to me for? I wish he'd leave me alone."

All this is getting so confoundedly absurd, I think it best to throw the whole thing up and laugh; but Mrs. Penny does not join, and Clarissa leaves the room with an intensely hurt expression, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. As soon as we are alone Mrs. Penny says, "My dear, are you not well? What an excited state you do get into sometimes! Don't you think you stop indoors too much, and over-exert yourself on the management of the domestic affairs?"

"Mrs. Penny," I say, as calmly as I can, "how came you to interfere with that goose?"

She says, "Did *you* want to cook it?"

"Certainly not!" I reply, with warmth. "What does Clarissa know about it?"

"Nothing whatever," replies Mrs. Penny. "She wasn't even going to empty it."

"Pshaw!" I exclaim, almost driven to frenzy, "where are the feathers?"

"Good gracious!" says Mrs. Penny, "I don't know, but I suppose the man has them."

"The man!" I shriek. "There's a man in it, is there? What man?"

"The poulterer, of course."

"Poulterer! What poulterer?"

"Where we bought the goose."

"The gander—or the goose as you call him, that is at this moment cooking downstairs at the kitchen fire?"

"Yes, certainly!"

What an extraordinary coincidence!

I hope I have not gone on in any way which might be looked upon as at all bordering on the ridiculous. Under the circumstances, however, perhaps, as nothing is known of *my* Gander, I had better not go into the matter. I will pass it off lightly.

I have passed it off lightly, to the best of my ability, and we have dinner; but I fancy Mrs. Penny eyes me strangely from time to time, and is even more than usually silent.

"By the bye, dear, I forgot to tell you," she says, suddenly, "there was a Mr. Jawkins called when you were out, and said he desired to see you upon some parochial business."

I involuntarily start. Luckily she does not notice.

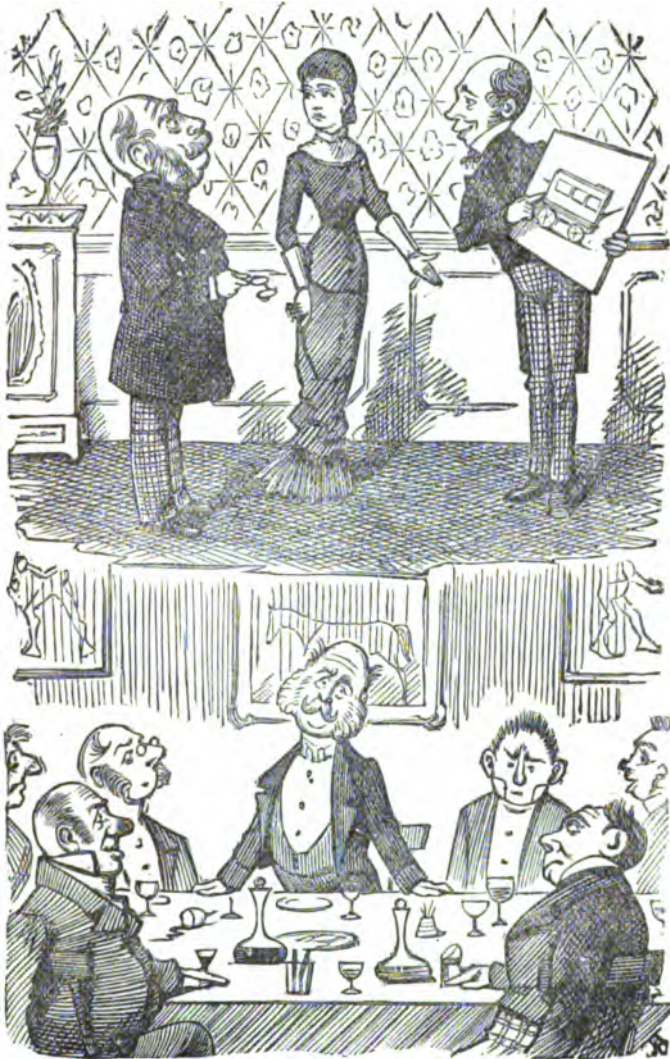
"It was to solicit your aid," she continues, "upon what he termed a subject of some importance. A new omnibus is projected to run from the Halfway House to the Worldsend, a want for which, he assured me, had been long felt in the neighbourhood; and he had ventured, at the suggestion of his fellow-townsmen, to solicit you to take up a prominent position on the Committee of Local Management, if you would so far honour them by the weight of your name and influence."

It must be owned that this Mr.—a—Jawkins has not altogether left his business in the worst hands, and that Mrs. Penny has really, upon occasions, a manner of expressing herself which, in a female, is highly creditable. With regard to my fitness for the post in question, modesty compels me to refrain from comment. I may, ere now (upon the Ensanguined Field) have been put to the test, and not found wanting; but this is not for me to say. Upon the face of it, however, it would, at least, seem probable that he who had successfully moved bodies of artillery might be capable of tooling along two 'bus 'osses and a 'bus.

I put this notion, which is allegorical, of course, as respects the tooling, and Mrs. Penny says, "They don't want you to drive, dear. They'll have regular men both in front and behind. I asked them that when they spoke of your conducting."

Mrs. Penny is, as I may have said before, a most extraordinary mixture of *naïveté* and intelligence.

"I must take the matter into consideration," I say, after a pause. "It is a question whether I can spare the time."



The Major becomes a Local Celebrity.

"He asked for your Christian name," says Mrs. Penny, "and wanted to know whether you were a Major of Volunteers."

Next morning, it would appear, Mr. Jawkins is expected to call again.

Next morning has arrived, and with it Jawkins. Mrs. Penny has introduced me, and after certain necessary inquiries, I have given my consent. This evening is the first meeting, and I am voted to the Chair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HE GOES FORTH.

THIS point settled, the question naturally arises, What next?



Contemplation.

These reflections occur to me as I stand gazing at my name, in large type, upon a yellow bill, displayed in the window of a local outfitter.

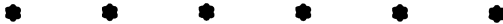
Whilst I am yet absorbed in the contemplation, the outfitter comes out and asks if he can do anything for me.



Solicitation.

“No,” I reply, waving him off; “I was merely reading this announcement.”

“Got a nice overcoat inside,” he continues: “give you a good price for that old worn-out 'un you 've got on.”



It would appear that it is one of the duties of a Committee to meet together and have dinner, each member defraying his own expenses, except in the case of the Chair, who, it appears, is expected to stand something extra. The dinner takes place at the tavern the 'bus starts from.

Besides the dinner there is other business, of course.

There are, for instance, the resolutions which have to be carried—(Mrs. Penny later on asks "Where to?")—and there is an amendment proposed by Jawkins and opposed by Dawkins, and a vote of thanks for the Chair, to which I am responding when some one announces that the haunch of mutton is on the table. Whilst I briefly apologize for not being able to reply at greater length, the Committee go away one at a time, and choose their places at the table. When I join them there are cheers.

It is really a very excellent haunch, and is done ample justice to by all concerned. I carve.

The cloth removed, the toasts proposed are—"The Queen, and the rest of the Royal Family;" "Her Majesty's Ministers;" "The Army, the Navy, and Auxiliary Forces;" and "The Success of the New Omnibus." To this is added, "The health of the Proprietor of the New Omnibus," "The health of the Builder," and some one adds "The health of the Drivers and Conductors." Our host is also proposed; and then some one says,—“Though last, not least; here's our worthy Chair, the Major!”

As I rise to reply, some one says, "The 'bus is at the door. Come on. Let's start."

There is some little delay before I can get my bill properly adjusted—two bottles of port, belonging to two other gentlemen, having somehow found their way into it, owing to an error on the part of the waiter—and there is a still further delay in finding my hat, which has got covered over inadvertently; and when I get down to the tavern door, from which the 'bus is to start, I find it has already started.

.

My first instinct is to let the 'bus go, and treat it with contempt, but the idea occurs to me that this, in the Chairman, is scarcely the course to pursue. Meanwhile two men are cheering vociferously, and a small boy more vociferously still. Just as the 'bus is turning the corner I seize on the small boy, and bid him run after it, and call "Stop!"

The small boy says, "Why? It's full."

I struggle hard to make him understand, and then seeing that the case is desperate, start running myself. At the same time some one else, somehow, manages to reach the small boy's mental stronghold, and the



Determination.

result is that the small boy is now running ahead of me, shouting "Stop!" with all the power of his young lungs.

On this an elderly female spectator adds her voice, and waves her umbrella.

Meanwhile the 'bus pursues its allotted course, and I follow after, but I don't shout, because I have no breath left.



Desperation.

At last the conductor and somebody on the knifeboard of the 'bus realizes what has happened, and induce the driver to stop. A moment afterwards, and every one else on the knifeboard on either side seems to have realized also, and is shouting "Stop!" too.

It seems to be only the driver now who does not realize. And now he does, and it is only the horses who can't be got to understand, and won't be pulled up.

Explanations have been made, and somebody who has a pocket-pistol, containing some really remarkably fine cognac, has passed it to me. Matters, I may say, are at the present moment on a more satisfactory footing, and all is going merrily with one exception—the 'bus.

The 'bus itself, however, has come to a sudden standstill, owing to something wrong with the off wheel.

The off wheel is not, as yet, quite off, but it waggles alarmingly, and we have come to a full stop whilst it is looked at. The populace meanwhile cheering, from time to time.

Those in the inside have got out, and those on the roof got down. We are now all looking at the wheel waggle, at the instigation of the conductor, who says "it is as loose as water."

Somebody suggest as "gin and water," and some one else says "Halfway House."

A trusty messenger meanwhile has been dispatched in search of a wheelwright, but he throw a deal of time into the conveyance of his message, and as we have by this time come back from the Halfway House, some one else suggests a bit of string, and one, who is the wag of the party, produces a second-hand postage stamp, which he affixes to the wheel with much solemnity, and then calls on us to resume our places.



We *are* off now. A man with a hammer has done something to the wagging wheel, and it waggles no longer. We depart with three cheers, and reach our journey's end without further adventure. Glasses round ensue, and then each, having lighted a cigar, sallies forth to resume his place.

Then there is a little unpleasantness. Some of the general public, under the impression that the 'bus is for their accommodation, have made themselves comfortable inside and out.

There is a washerwoman inside, and a basket of clothes on the roof. There are also six navvies, all

very drunk, on the knifeboard, who won't move when told to do so.

"Major," says some one, "you who are, as it were, at home upon the Ensanguined Field, now 's your time!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HE COMES BACK.

THE midnight hour has chimed. The stars are dotted o'er the deep blue canopy of heaven. The silvery moon is shedding its gentle lustre upon the Battle of Bosworth Field Road, and I (Major Penny), seated upon a stone in front of my own semi-detached villa residence, am regarding the same with feelings in my breast wherein sorrow gets the upper hand of anger, to give place in its turn to almost bitter irony as it finds vent in words:—

"What," I say, as I stretch forth my hand in the direction of the dwelling above alluded to, "what have I to do with this? Is it worthy of me? No!"

Then I laugh a hollow, mirthless laugh that is bad to hear, and snap my fingers at the habitation aforesaid.

"What," I continue, in a tone of withering scorn, "what indeed?"

No! 't is useless striving to disguise the fact any longer. I have this evening arrived at the conclusion, and reluctantly has that conclusion been arrived at,

that a more extended sphere of action is necessary for the development of faculties nurtured by the cannon's roar upon the *Ensanguined Field*!

I will not say that the management even of such a household as that which consists of myself, Mrs. Penny, and the girl Clarissa, does not at times call forth, on a minor scale, qualities similar to those exercised upon the *Field* in question, while the cannons were on the roar——

"Yet, still, Major Penny, sir," I cannot resist from exclaiming, "yet, still, is this all that we have expected of you, whose early years of promise were the talk of—were, in fact, very frequently mentioned by your own mother? No, once more, and still more emphatically, No!"

It may possibly have been observed by those who have taken the heads of festive boards, and regulated the pushing round of the flowing bowl, that episodes of unwonted eloquence happen later on—too late, rather, for them to be of any use. At the present moment Cicero (if I may be pardoned a cant phrase of the day) would hardly "be in it" with the hero of this narrative.

"Major Penny, sir," I naturally exclaim, "now or never is the time to rise, and, if possible, Major Penny, sir, be equal to the hic—I mean oc—only it wasn't 'ock, it was B and S—and B and S is foolish when over-done. Yet this is trifling! A truce to ribaldry. Where's the latch-key?"

* * * * *

It is really most extraordinary, when you come to

think of it, that the fact that I hitherto have not been in the habit of carrying a latch-key has actually slipped my memory. and I am only recalled to a full sense of the situation by Clarissa, the girl, jerking the street door open whilst I am making sure, with one hand, where the keyhole is. Fortunately, I am searching on the opposite side of the door to that on which the keyhole exists, so I don't go in with much of a run when the door opens.

Clarissa observes, "Missus was very tired, sir, and she's gone to bed; and would you like any supper, sir, she says?"

It may not have struck everybody, yet still it may, possibly, be allowed by some, that when the vocalist is suddenly called upon by the musician for his upper G, he, as a rule, has it handy. Called upon now for a simple monosyllable, with a choice between the negative and the affirmative, it, oddly enough, seems to me to require a moment or two to decide which monosyllable is the safest to venture on. Meanwhile Clarissa adds, "Or would you like any more to drink, sir?"

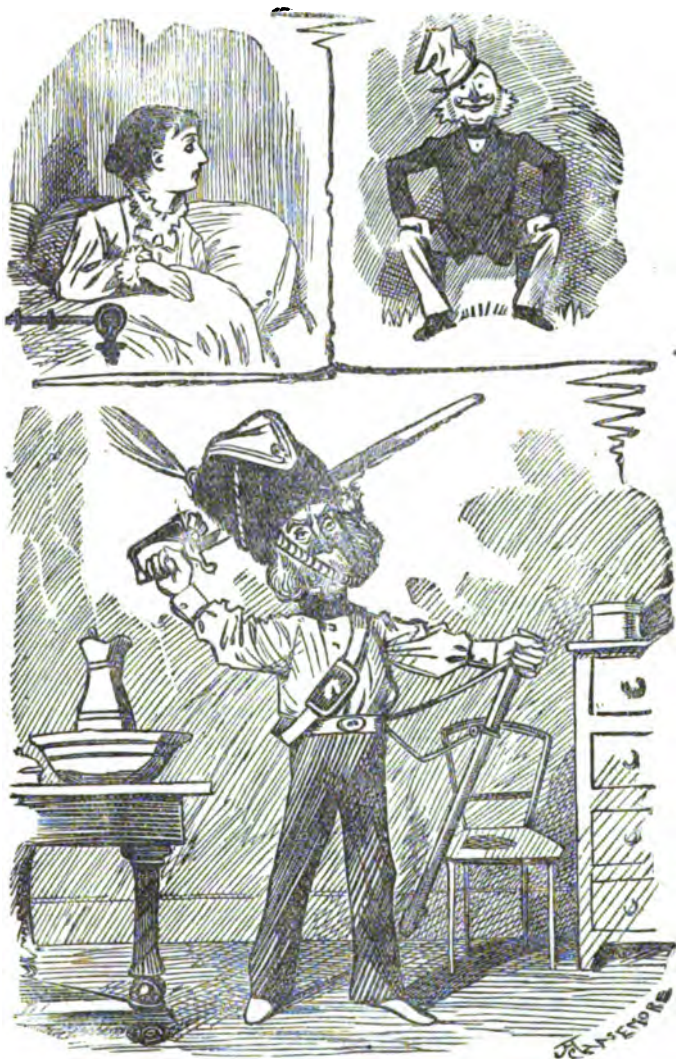
* * * * *

"Anthick—more—dring?"

* * * * *

Thank goodness, Clarissa has retired—hastily, as it seemed to me, and I am sitting on a kind of bench arrangement in the hall, with my hat on my head, my right boot and umbrella in my right hand, and the candlestick in the left, wondering what on earth I am to do to get off my left boot with my hands so full.

* * * * *



The Return of the Reveller.

I am upstairs in the dressing-room. So are my boots, my hat, and my umbrella, and the candle and candlestick (the extinguisher fell somewhere and would not be found).

Apparently Mrs. Penny is asleep. Let us be cautious!

How strange all this is, though, when you come to consider! There was a time when the cannon roared and the Ensanguined Field—I forget exactly what the Ensanguined Field did, but it was awfully Ensanguined—and look at me at this moment!

I can scarcely realize those days of carnage, those days when death was nothing and glory everything, and you called for another horse when the one was shot down under you (if you happened to be mounted at the time), and rushed headlong on the foe in the heat of their retreat, and cut down the first exhausted straggler you came up with.

Yonder, in that corner cupboard, where the dirty clothes are kept, is the faithful sword that ere now has kept by my side, never leaving it for a moment, through periods of the intensest suspense, when the enemy were close at your back, and you had nothing but your heels to look to. Why shouldn't I?

* * * * *

I have! My trusty blade is buckled on. The tunic of my warlike days doesn't quite fit, but as far as the head goes my shako is all there, and now for the sword exercise! Do I remember it? Let me see!

Crash!

I had no notion the trusty blade could have been

sharp enough to cut a water-jug in two, and now here is Mrs. Penny, who says she fancied she heard something break, and wants to know if I am dressing for a fancy ball.

“Whatshemeanth?”

CHAPTER XX.

SHE HOUNDS HIM DOWN.

I PRESUME that there are moments in the lives of most of us, upon the Ensanguined Field and elsewhere, when one does not feel altogether heroic. Such a moment is this, and I, Major Penny, sitting now *vis-à-vis* with my breakfast bacon, am hardly equal to the occasion.

Meanwhile Mrs. Penny is, if I may be permitted the expression, preternaturally sprightly. Mrs. Penny has been up hours, playing inspiring music for a considerable length of time upon the drawing-room piano. Also she has carolled blithely upon the staircase, and she is humming now. She has breakfasted some time ago, and my breakfast has been kept warm. It consists of hot tea, dry toast, and bacon, which swims in its fat.

I don't feel lively, as I have previously observed. On the contrary, I feel deadly sick, and the aspect of this ghastly bacon fills me with unutterable loathing. If Mrs. Penny had not got her eye on me, which she

has, I would hurl this bacon into space through the open window.

As it is, however, I can but resort to subterfuge. I, therefore, toy with the tea-cup and dally with the rasher, and endeavour to tire Mrs. Penny out. But she won't be tired out. She tells me I have let my tea get cold, and wants to fill up the cup with scalding liquid and have my bacon warmed again.

I have grave doubts as to the probable result of drinking a cup of hot tea, and shudder when I think of the certain consequences attendant on a mouthful of bacon. If ever again I take the Chair, or have anything more to do with any confounded omnibuses, I'm a Dutchman.

"There's such a capital leader here in the *Times* about habitual drunkards," says Mrs. Penny, who is reading the paper.

* * * * *

Thank goodness, I am at length alone, and not a moment is to be lost. This bacon must be made a parcel of, and this tea emptied into the coal-scuttle.

So much for the tea, as long as it does not run out through a crevice anywhere; and now for the bacon! Where is there a piece of paper to wrap it up in before I throw it out of window?

* * * * *

She has returned before I have opened the window. I have concealed the bacon on my body, and am dissembling like anything behind the day-before-yesterday's *Standard*, upside down.

* * * * *

Time has elapsed. I casually observe some moisture on the brown holland floor cover, in the immediate neighbourhood of the coal-scuttle, and the grease is beginning to come through the paper round the bacon. I must put the bacon in a place of safety, somewhere, for the present. Suppose I put it behind the looking-glass.



The Discovery.



There is a knock at the door. One of the people belonging to that confounded Omnibus Committee. I'll say I'm out. No, it is too late. Clarissa has bounded upstairs like a greyhound and let him in. He nods to Mrs. Penny with hideous familiarity, and digs me in the ribs with a familiarity which is more hideous still.

He says, "It was wettish last night, wasn't it, Major?"
Mrs. Penny stares.

He adds, "Mops and broomy I call it. Seen some

of 'em this morning. They've got heads on to 'em, too, make no mistake. Well, I can't stand it myself, you know. Ain't *you* rather bad?"

I don't exactly know how I do it, but I get him out of the room somehow, and presently get him out of the house, and then, unable to bear up any longer, I pretend I'm busy, and take a fitful sleep in my *sanctum sanctorum*, with my head in my hands.

But the respite is a short one. Mrs. Penny has a nice hot lunch of pork sausages and mashed potatoes prepared for me. The only thing for me to do, as far as I can see, is to go a long walk beyond the boundary of the suburb, and lie down in a lonely field.

Meanwhile Mrs. Penny, who is setting the room to-rights, alights suddenly upon that wretched bacon. "Major," she cries, "will you look at this?"



The Denunciation.

I turn another shade of green, and ask, "What is it?"

She says, "Clarissa makes parcels of the food to take home to her mother."

I exclaim, "Impossible! You must be mistaken."

She says, "Who else could have put it here? I will ring the bell and tax her with it at once."

Poor, miserable girl, this cannot be; and yet, how can I own that it was I—I, Major P——

At this moment Clarissa herself enters the room.

"If you please, mum, the paper-boy says his missus says as some one's been tearin' bits out of the *Times*, and you must keep it, please, because it's no good to her now, and she can't send it out to nobody else to read."

Deuce take it all! in my agitation I must have torn the *Times*, which I have on the hourly hire system, instead of the *Standard*, which I buy.

"All right," I say, eager to get rid of her anyhow out of the room; "I will pay for it, of course."

"See," cries Mrs. Penny, who still clings to the hideous packet of bacon, "this is the identical piece that was torn out. Is it possible——"

Upon my word Mrs. Penny really has at times a way of hounding one down, as it were, that there ought to be a limit to, and on the present occasion I feel it my duty to request her as a personal favour to allow the matter to drop.

"Why, I do believe," she says, when Clarissa has left the room, "that you've been playing at hiding the bacon all by yourself. Well, that was funny of you, Major!"

* * * * *

I am not able to make a suitable reply to this re-



Something wrong again.

mark, which at the best must be allowed to be somewhat ill-placed and unseemly, before Clarissa has once more burst upon the scene, this time with a distraught air and breathless. "Oh, if you please, mum," she cries, "I do wish master would come and see what it is that's buried in the back garden. I am afraid to. I think it's a body."

Horrible thought! That Gander! I had quite forgotten him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY RATTLE HIM UP.

MRS. PENNY won't leave that 'bus business alone. She says, "You seem to me so eminently suited for it!"

"For what?" I ask. I don't know how it is, but I so frequently have to request Mrs. Penny to make her meaning plainer.

"For the performance of the duties connected with the management of affairs of that kind," she replies. "By-the-by, didn't you tell me there was a button off the neck of one of your shirts?"

"All of them, I think," I reply, with withering sarcasm.

"I wonder whether I've got buttons enough," she says, with intense seriousness (I don't believe she has the faintest perception of satire). "But if not, Clarissa could run out. No; she's busy—but you, perhaps?"

I take no notice. 'T is true, I smile—a bitter smile, but I don't feel equal to a wordy contest. I simply subside behind my *Standard*, still two days old, and upside down, as before, and ask myself whether I (Major Penny), who have trodden the Ensanguined Field (as I may possibly elsewhere have mentioned), should be expected to pass the autumn of his life fetching and carrying ignoble pennyworths of shirt buttons?



Rap! tap! tap! tap! tap! tap!

Has it ever occurred to any one that, in the suburbs of London, there is a habit or custom which prevails among the lower classes of assaulting your knocker, when you have one, with unnecessary violence? For instance, an emissary from the local shoemaker, the other day, who set up my heels, came with six separate and distinct bangs (I counted them), and the local hatter's assistant who ironed my hat played a perfect

fantasia on my knocker, with a visitors' bell accompaniment.

As I lay down my *Standard* (right side up this time), I rise with the full determination of wreaking vengeance on the rap-tappist, at this moment bombarding my premises, and who, I have reason to believe, is an itinerant vendor of groundsel, who has been already told, ten times, to my knowledge, that we don't keep a bird.

I am, however, mistaken: it is not the young gentleman alluded to, but a local authority, whom I remember at the omnibus place, and a stranger of semi-military aspect, who wears a check cut-away shooting coat and a billycock hat.

Although it is not Groundsel, I must confess I do not feel too delighted, and, with but scant courtesy, bid them enter. Boodle (the local authority's name is Boodle) says, "I have called upon rather unpleasant business, Major Penny, concerning which, as a future member of our Local Board, I feel it my duty to consult you, and to invite your support and assistance."

I begin observing that, "Really, not having very much time on my hands"—but he interrupts me.

"It is a question of more moment, Major, than might at first appear. There are institutions, bulwarks, landmarks, if I may be allowed the expression, that must be closely guarded and held intact, or where are we?"

I say, "Certainly, that's the question."

"Yes," repeats Boodle, "that is the question. What has become of the Gander?"

I am luckily seated at the time, or most probably I



Pail, the Detective.

should lose my balance as he says this, and I can only sit, open-mouthed, gasping. Booodle continues: "As a recent and, I trust I may add, distinguished addition to our body, Major, you perhaps may not yet have become cognizant of all the details relating to our Gander; but you must have noticed him upon the green in front of your house. Major, he has disappeared! Possibly by fair means, but, more probably, by foul; and this is not all. With that Gander, owing to certain provisions in the will of his former proprietor, goes with him a certain yearly sum paid by his former proprietor's executors to the guardians of this parish. I will not say that the sum is large; but as one of the Board, is it not my duty to jealously guard a penny as much as a pound? And, Major, I think you will be gratified to learn that we have, so to speak, spotted the delinquent. We know, although we may not be able to prove it all at once, who has killed our Gander. This gentleman is Mr. Pail, the famous detective officer, and it will be his duty to bring the crime home to the culprit."

I am not quite certain whether I am on my head or my heels. Booodle is gone, but Mr. Pail, the detective, remains behind. I am rather surprised to find that it is not I whom they suspect, but the wretched man who occupies the other half of my semi-detached residence; and for some reason I cannot as yet quite fathom, he is sitting on the rockwork, *under which the Gander is buried*, fixing the other half with an unflinching eye. For what I know to the contrary, this may go on for weeks.

CHAPTER XXII.

SHE REFLECTS.

I AM at the present moment on the very point of asking myself whether I, (Major Penny) who upon the *Ensanguined*—

But here exhausted nature is incapable of further pursuing the subject. What have I now to do with *Ensanguined Fields*? True, I may in times long gone have won honour, distinction, nay, military rank even (by purchase); but of what avail has all this been? Observe me, here, at this moment. I—Major—but you know me by this time, or ought to do so, confound you! Excuse me if this expression is uncourteous, but I really do not feel at all myself to-day.

I have just returned from the City. In consequence of what I read this morning in the *City* article, I went into the City rather hastily. According to the *City* article, the way I have invested that money I got away from the fellow who ruined Mrs. Penny's father, is likely to turn out rather unsatisfactory. Mrs. Penny is not aware of the nature of the investment I have made. At the time I did not think it necessary to inform her, and I feel at the present moment, after the awful fall there has been, somewhat indisposed to give her any information.

My man of business, who has the matter now in hand, says, "Why didn't you come to me sooner, and I might have done something?" As matters now stand, my man of business doesn't exactly say he can

do nothing at all, because if he did I don't clearly see what on earth is going to become of me; but the hopes he hangs out for the future are of the dimmest.

As, wayworn and weary, I approach the semi-detached residence in the Battle of Bosworth Field Road, taken when all was bright and hopeful—ah! how long ago it seems now!—the tear-drop rises to my eye, and I groan aloud.

A ribald child, passing me at the moment, calls to his nurse to “look at that old gentleman making funny faces.”

As I mount the steps there is little left of the elasticity that was wont to be a leading characteristic of that martial stride which upon the——Bother!

'T is indeed bitter, when the time comes that all one's past seems worthless to look back upon; so much energy expended without results—so much time lost!

As I enter I ask Clarissa listlessly if dinner is nearly ready. She says, “The butcher has sent nothing. Did you forget to order it, sir?” It is true I did forget to order it. “But,” I exclaim, “is there no one else in the house capable of seeing to things during my absence?” Clarissa says, “You always arranges everything yourself, sir. We didn't like to interfere.” “Go and get some chops,” I reply, gloomily, as I enter my study and close the door.

A moment afterwards Clarissa taps. “Please, sir, missus and me can't make the washing right. Have you got the book? And please, sir, the policeman in the back garden wants to speak to you.”

I can't find the washing-book, but I go out to the policeman. He is still fooling about over that precious

Gander business, and still sits perched like a pelican on the top of the rockwork, looking out afar.

On seeing him I can scarcely refrain from a smile, but I suppose there will be a deuce of a row when the body is at length discovered, if it ever is. My only comfort is that the detective is planted directly over the spot where the body of the victim lies buried; so the secret is, for the present, comparatively safe.

He is a man of few words, is Mr. Pail, the detective, but what little he does say he ekes out, as it were, by winks, which appear to be of enormous significance as long as you've got the key; without that, there's perhaps a little vagueness about them.

I ask him if he is any nearer the Gander than he was, and he says (with a wink) he is not many miles off. I say, "How long do you think it will take?" and he says, "We mustn't be hasty." He is paid by the day, and evidently means to make a longish job of it. Meanwhile my mind is occupied by other matters, and I wish to goodness I could sit down quietly somewhere and think. Meanwhile, also, where the deuce is my left slipper?

It is a most extraordinary thing, but there seems to be some evil genius in this house, for ever mixing things up and putting them away in places where they can't be found again. I mention this to Clarissa. I say, "When I was the head of a former establishment, and had the entire charge of a household consisting of my three sisters and the domestics, I never remember losing anything." Clarissa says, "I don't know how it is, sir, I'm sure. It seems to me it's one person's work picking things up after you." I say, "Clarissa,

you may go!" She replies, "There is no chops at the butcher's. The butcher says it's a pity you don't make your mind up earlier in the day." I say, "Silence! I will see to it myself."

* * * * *

I have been to the butcher and given him a bit of my mind. I was in no humour to brook the fellow's insolence at this moment. *He* has given me a goodish bit of *his* mind also, and says he don't want my custom, and none of my "stuck-up bounciness, neither," and, if convenient, he'd like his bill settled.



The Dawn of Doubt.

Very well; there are other butchers, I presume. It is a good long walk to any of their shops; but I don't care about that. I have returned in triumph with a piece of beefsteak. It is true it is a straggling kind of piece to look at, somewhat resembling the map of Great Britain when spread out, and Clarissa says it will take a lot of banging, she knows, before any one

can put their teeth through it ; but that is of little consequence.

* * * * *

I have just found my left slipper locked up in a drawer of my writing-table in my study. The key of my drawer was on a bunch I had in my pocket. This is most singular.

We have worried some of the steak, and I am seated in an exhausted condition before the parlour fire, with one leg crossed over the other, deep in thought. Suddenly I observe Mrs. Penny's eye resting on my foot, and ask what is the matter. "Nothing," she says ; "I was only thinking how unbecoming carpet slippers are."

* * * * *



"Wha-a-at?"

There are moments when it is unwise to rouse the slumbering lion, and this is one of them. The lion is roused, the slippers have been hurled into space, and I am striding the length and breadth of the parlour in my newest and tightest boots. "I can't think how it is," says Mrs. Penny, "that men—particularly little men—will persist in buying things that creak so."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE IS NOT HAPPY.

I AM not happy! I am anything but happy!

There have been words between Mrs. Penny and me, and things may have been said that may possibly be regretted; but it appeared to me at the time necessary that I should assert my authority, and my authority has been asserted.

If I have a doubt now, it is as to the efficacy of the assertion. With the ordinary run of females, according to my experience, which has extended over some years, I have no hesitation in saying that what I said would have been found to have a quelling effect; but in Mrs. Penny I do not notice this.

This confession may, looked at in some lights, possibly appear to be a humiliating one to make; but I candidly own I have been mistaken in Mrs. Penny. It would appear that I never have understood Mrs. Penny. I don't understand Mrs. Penny now, and I am half inclined to doubt whether I ever shall.

As matters stand now, I have asked Mrs. Penny whether or not I am the master of this house, and she has informed me that she has no reason to believe that I am the mistress.

Other questions of a similar character have met with replies of a nature resembling the above; but still things are far from being on a satisfactory footing, and I repeat what I said to begin with. I am not happy!

The moon is shining brightly overhead, but I heed not its brightness. If I mistake not, it shone in a similar manner upon the occasion of our honeymoon, and very likely has done the same thing for other people's honeymoons before that. As I pace to and fro in the stilly night, in Battle of Bosworth Field Road, the silence is only broken by that creaking of those boots to which reference has elsewhere been made; and as my thoughts revert to the fact, I involuntarily knit my brows.

I am, however, interrupted in the knitting by Clarissa, who comes to ask if I know anything of the cellar key.

I don't; I simply know that it is on the same ring with the store-room cupboard key, the key of the cheffonier and that of the linen-chest, and that I am generally supposed to carry it about with me. Strange to say, I haven't got it in my pocket.

I go indoors and search without avail. Meanwhile, Clarissa suggests trying some other keys, and brings the keys of all the rooms in the house in a bunch, and we spend twenty minutes trying them on the cellar door; after which Clarissa and I spend half an hour trying to get them back into their right keyholes

again up and downstairs. Then I fall back into my arm-chair and try and think where the deuce I put that confounded ring. Meanwhile Clarissa says—

“Hadn't I better go to the public house and get a bottle of port? Poor missus must be pretty near tired of waiting by this time!”

It seems rather preposterous to buy public house port wine when one has a dozen or so of really superior port in one's own cellar; but, unless I do so, the only way out of the difficulty would be to break open the cellar door, which would be rather preposterous too, and also slightly difficult.

However, it won't exactly do, after asking Mrs. Penny whether she did not think me competent to conduct our household arrangements, to let her know that the keys have been lost solely through my own—in point of fact, so to speak—want of care.

Presently I accidentally overhear Mrs. Penny asking Clarissa, who has gone upstairs for her bonnet what ever is the matter with the master, and whether she does not really think I require medicine or medical advice. I also overhear Clarissa saying she thinks it would do me a power of good, adding, that she herself always takes two compound rhubarbs and a black draught in the morning.

There are moments when rage and fury master one, as it were, and one kicks inoffensive objects, such as carpet slippers, into space, and this is one of them. There! There!! There!!!

And yet it does seem hard, too, on those carpet slippers. Hers! (I mean the other Hers, of course!)

And why should I? Why, indeed? A sort of kind



Something Wrong.

of pathetic remorse—overwhelming, as a whole, hough somewhat vague in its attendant details—prompts me to pause and pick up the left-hand slipper, and kiss and cry over it, and wish I were dead, to the spluttering light of a solitary burner at the end of the passage; which, by the way, the gas company have written to say will be cut off if the last quarter isn't paid up the day after to-morrow.

Clarissa returns full of a mysterious import I don't quite feel equal to grapple with, and asks if I don't think I should like a nice nightcap to-night.

I naturally ask what nightcap, and why? and she says, with even an increase of import, "That's all right, sir; never mind. Take my advice. It'll do you a lot of good!"

Roughly put, no doubt, but well meaning—evidently well meaning; and why shouldn't I, after all? Indeed, occasionally—that is to say, generally—I do love what is called in the vernacular or vulgar tongue a nightcap!

* * * * *

Good Heavens! There is a most extraordinary taste about this! Surely—but no, that is almost incredible out of a penny number or a lady's novel, published by a high-class West-end publisher! Surely she cannot—she would not——!

And yet I have been led to understand (by my favourite lady novelist) that many—indeed, I may almost say, the generality of—wives *put them away by the aid of a deadly but inscrutable poison.*

* * * * *

After all, it was only the good medicine they tried to administer thus.

After all, they meant well, only I wish they hadn't.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHE IS OUT.

I AM in a deuce of a mess!

My man in the City has written to me relative to the investment of my little capital, and the result as regards the little capital (I can't help laughing in sardonic tones as I mention the fact) is that the little capital is worse than nowhere, and I shall never see a penny piece of it again.



Something more Wrong.

After mastering the contents of my business man's communication five minutes ago, I had laid it aside and was adding up the items of the unpaid and seemingly unpayable tradesmen's bills as a kind of pastime, but now I think I may as well open the rest of the letters. What's this? I ought to know the writing. To be sure. It's from Twopenny—in point of fact,

from the father of the Twins—and—come, this is not bad of Twopenny—he is complaining of my want of regularity in discharging the Twins' school bills. Here also is a letter from the schoolmaster himself, saying that if the Twins' arrears are not paid up at once, he will be reluctantly compelled to send the Twins home to me. To me, too! I like that. Why to me, I should like to know? How about Twopenny?

Hullo! This is an epistle from the Girls! What's wrong with *them*, I wonder? It is most astonishing how those Girls do always contrive to turn up at the wrong moment with some preposterous sense of injury, and now I suppose——

No,—I say, this is *too* bad!

“We have heard all,” they say, “and shall be with our poor, dear, unfortunate, imprudent brother almost as soon as this letter reaches him.”

I should like to escape somewhere, if it would not be an unmanly act to desert Mrs. Penny. But perhaps it would. By the way, though, where is Mrs. Penny? I have neither seen nor heard anything of her all the morning. “Clarissa!”

Clarissa, questioned on the subject, says that Mrs. Penny received a telegram about two hours ago, and put on her bonnet immediately, and left the house in a great hurry, without saying a word. What is the name of all that is mysterious?——

By Jove! here is the telegram, and it is a clincher. Mrs. Penny's long-lost father, generally supposed to have gone down in the *Bella* with the Claimant and Kenealy, has turned up again, and, like Jack Robinson, would appear never to have been drowned at all.



To the Rescue.

He has too, of course, turned up in a hungry condition, and if we can't get him a Tichborne estate or something of that kind, he will want to live on us; and how, otherwise than in a cannibalistic sense, he is going to do that is a puzzler.

Rat! tat! tat! Here are the Girls.

The first Girl has hugged and wept over me. So has the second. I have been hugged and wept over by all three.

"Oh, why did we ever leave you?" says Bathsheba. "And how could you think you could ever manage all by yourself?"

"What do you mean?" I ask, as calmly as I can.

"Did not our poor mother say he was not to be trusted alone?" says Cassandra.

"What do you mean?" I inquire, smothering my feelings to the best of my ability.

"But it is all that woman," cries Ursula. "It is

she who has led our poor, dear, unhappy, misguided brother into these wild excesses!"

"What do you mean?" I roar in tones of thunder, of which none of the Girls take the slightest notice.

"And where is she?" they ask one another, as though they, arriving suddenly thus, ought to be altogether the best people to give one another every information upon the subject. "Where she ought to be? No! At her husband's side? Certainly not! Where then? Ah!!!"

Upon my word of honour the Girls seem to be piling it up, as it were, and I don't know that I should condescend to afford them any information did not one of them pick up and read aloud the words on the telegram from Mrs. Penny's long-lost papa.

"Good gracious me!" cries Cassandra. "How inconsiderate! How *wicked* of her, and knowing, too, how embarrassed you are. My poor brother!" And they all hug and weep over me once more.

"But look here," I say: "she does not know about all this, and, if anything, I fancy her long-lost father's turning up is as great a surprise to her as to me——"

"Another case of Twopenny!" exclaims Bathsheba. "But, of course, our poor, weak, put-upon, and victimized brother will not again be the pitiful dupe he was before."

Confound this way of sympathizing! but at the same time I *am* resolved. And as I remember once upon the——Bother that, though!——suffice it to say
I AM RESOLVED!

CHAPTER XXV.

HE IS NOWHERE.

ANOTHER rat—tat—tat! This time it is Mrs. Penny and her long-lost father, to whom Clarissa opens the door, and they go into the parlour together.

Bathsheba says, "Everything depends on our first step. Let it be decisive. Let us go in a body and confront them!"

I somehow hardly think this will be the best plan. On the whole, I would rather do what confronting



The General.

there has to be done by myself, and I presume that I, who on—but no matter—

In the parlour I find Mrs. Penny and her long-lost father. I do not take much notice of Mrs. Penny, but fix my eye firmly on her long-lost father, who is seated. As I fix him, however, he rises, and, indeed, goes on rising to such an alarming height that I have to tilt my head backwards to keep pace with him, and before I can recover from the surprise at finding that Mrs. Penny's long-lost is so long when found, Mrs. Penny has introduced him thus: "My papa, General Pinner," and the General himself has laid his two hands upon my shoulders, and said, looking down upon me from somewhere near the ceiling, "Penny, I'm glad to meet you. She's a treasure, sir, is my girl. You treat her well, and are kind to her. She says so, and I am glad to hear it. I am glad to meet you!" And he smacks *me*—Major Penny—on the back!!! A person I know, who writes plays that answer, tells me you should work steadily up to your *dénouement*, and bring down your curtain sharp, without any superfluous dialogue.

I am not quite sure that I ever tried to work up to a *dénouement*, but I'm very certain now it has come I don't want to utter one unnecessary word upon the subject.

As briefly as possible, then, allow me to state that Mrs. Penny's long-lost father has for the last two years been lost in the centre of South Africa, something after the manner of the late Dr. Livingstone, only Mr. Stanley did not go out to find *him*. It would appear he earned the rank of General in the American Civil War, and in the centre of Africa acquired colossal wealth. I must confess that hitherto my estimate of American Generals has been small, but there some-

how seems no disputing General Pinner as an enormous fact many feet long.

* * * * *

There is a banging at the street door, and a clatter of hoofs upon the door-step. The Twins have arrived!

"Fine boys," the General says, "remarkably fine boys. Home for the holidays, I suppose? I am glad of that. I love to see boys at their sports. What games we shall have in the back garden!"

Hooray!

"I never heard of any one before of the name of Penny," says the General, "but the name of Twopenny is that of a dear old friend whom I would give the world to meet again, and lend a helping hand to, if he wants it. He saved my life!"

Perhaps it's our Twopenny, and he is coming to live with us. Hooray again!



The General lays it down.

"This pill-box of a place is unendurable," says the General, dashing his head for the tenth time against the hall lamp. "We must get something larger, and not in a confounded deadly-lively suburb like this. Something in Park Lane will do, and the Girls can live with us as well, and keep house."

I wonder what position I am to occupy? Once more, Hooray!



"Please, sir, a man has left this," says Clarissa.

What's this? Oh, I see: it's only Pail, the detective, who has caught the man who killed the Gander, and I am subpoenaed as a witness! Ho-o-o-ray!!!



CURTAIN.

(No call.)

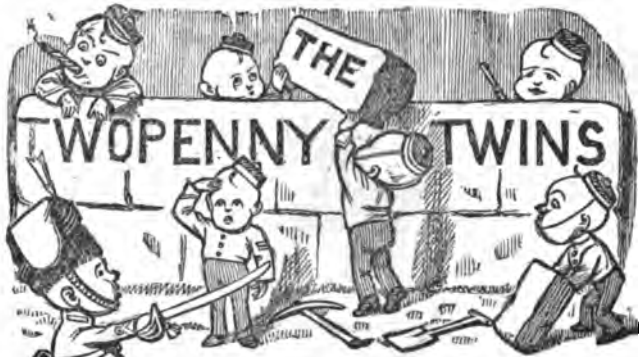




Demonstrations.







CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE TWINS FIRST HAPPEN
UNEXPECTEDLY.

AM Major Penny, the head of our family. We are four in number, and the others are girls. The Girls are of mature age. I am forty-two.

Originally we were five in number. The fifth (who is now no more) gave us a great deal of trouble. I live in the country, at what some people might call an out-of-the-way place. The Girls live with me, and I manage all business matters connected with our establishment and order the dinners.

The three surviving girls, my sisters, are named respectively Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula, which to some extent balances the Penny. As I am universally addressed in the home circle, and elsewhere, as the Major, my own Christian name is immaterial for the purposes of this narrative.

The fifth (who is now no more) was a Jemima. It was settled from the first that it would have been unreasonable to expect much of a Jemima—and we didn't. If No. 5 systematically persisted in being a surprise to the rest of her family, it is not her family's fault. The last surprise No. 5 (now no more) has given us has taken the shape of Twins.

Up to the last moment allowable before going to press, we have not got over them; indeed, I may almost go as far as to say that the twins go on astonishing us more and more, and appear likely to do so.

Relative to previous surprises, and before dealing with the Twin episode, it may not be out of place here to say a few words. No. 5 was the only married member of our family. I am myself a bachelor. During their youth the Girls, like other girls, were come after from time to time; but on all occasions I disapproved of the persons who did the coming-aftering, and spoke my sentiments on the subject to the Girls. "Bathsheba, Cassandra, or Ursula" (as the case may be), I would observe, "the man is a Fool, an Idiot, and an Ass, and you must be a Confounded Donkey to care about him."

There is nothing, in a case of this kind, like putting the thing properly. Almost invariably the truth thus put came right home to the Girl's mind, and she saw I was right. The truth, in like manner, brought home to the young man was, as a rule, equally efficacious. In the case of hesitation on either side, I boxed the Girl's ears, and broke the young man's head, respectively. I have never known this to fail. Try it in your own family circle.

And it would not have failed in the case of No. 5 if it had been tried. For the case of No. 5, however, I was to a great extent unprepared. I did not—nor indeed did the other Girls, but that matters little—deem it at all probable that there would be any coming-after with regard to No. 5, called Jemima (now no more), and when we heard that she had not only been come after without our noticing it, but had been carried right off without our observing it till some time after it had occurred, we were, for the first time, seriously surprised.

When, presently, we got a letter mentioning the fact in a casual kind of way, amongst other particulars relating to the weather and scenery in the part of the world she and the young man were taking their honeymoon in, it staggered us for a while, and then I called for my pistols. The Girls, flinging themselves upon me and clinging to me wildly, coupled with the fact that I had no pistols at the time, happily tended to avoid the shedding of blood, and the carrier-off of No. 5 still lived—indeed, he lives now.

The next severe surprise was the revelation of the man's name, which we took at first to be a deliberate insult, until Bathsheba turned Twopenny up in the "Post-Office Directory." The fact established that there were absolutely Twopennys existing, in addition to the Pennys we were already aware of, we could not help feeling the fact itself was a kind of slur on us, and that Jemima, had she changed her name at all, ought not to have changed it to the disparagement of her own family.

We naturally felt that if any change had been

necessary, Jemima might have got out of copper coinage, and been a Mrs. Silver, a Mrs. Shilling, or, indeed a Mrs. Pound; but, as has been already observed, we never expected anything at all satisfactory from Jemima.

Within a year the last thing but one anybody expected took place. Jemima quarrelled with her husband, left him, and sought shelter with the Girls and me. Before we had recovered from the shock which this event occasioned, came the last and most surprising of the surprises—the Twins.

At the present moment the Girls and I have the sole care of the twins, for, as I previously observed, their mother is no more. The twins are squeaking with all the strength of which they are capable. I am engaged in looking up the word "Infant," after failing to find "Baby," in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," for the purpose of ascertaining the best modes of treatment, whilst the Girls are discussing the relative merits of beef-tea and calves'-foot jelly.

I myself have doubts whether the twins are old enough—they were born only a week ago—for such treatment. The first nurse who attended the twins' mother Jemima (now no more) in her last illness, and had sole charge of the twin tribe up to now, has left us in a huff, owing to my giving her a bit of my mind; and if the ailments of early infancy are not fully treated in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," I shall feel uneasy.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH 'THE TWINS ARE WIDE AWAKE AND KICKING.

IT was a common remark with a late illustrious commander-in-chief that I, Major Penny, was the best man he ever knew at strategic movements with heavy artillery. Yet where am I now?

When I mention the fact that I am alone in the house with the twins, and that the twins are on the full howl, I may, perhaps, be more clearly understood and sympathized with should I repeat the question—Where am I now?

Upon the field of battle, whilst temporarily in command, I may have so disposed the men under me as to render highly valuable service. I will not deny it—and, indeed, why should I?—but here, in strict confidence, I own, in answer to the above interrogatory, I am rather worse than nowhere.

To some extent it may have been my fault that I am placed in the position in which I find myself. I may have been, to a certain extent, wrong in sending Ursula in search of What's-her-name's Soothing Syrup, when Bathsheba had just gone by my directions for Fennings' Powders, I 'aving forgotten to add them to Cassandra's list, with the extra feeding-bottle, etcetera, which I had packed her off to fetch in advance of the other two Girls.

I have said that the twins are howling—but I anti-

cipate. Let us rather go back a few minutes, and imagine the twins peacefully slumbering side by side.

Just at this instant it is rather difficult to imagine anything approaching such a state of things on the part of the twins, but let us try to do so.

The door, then, has just closed (with a bang) behind Ursula, and a moment afterwards I become conscious of a twitching in the off eyebrow of the near twin.

I hold my breath and wait. I am in the act of walking at the time: one leg is on the ground and the other isn't, when I become, as it were, frozen into stone, like the flying Mercury of ancient sculpture.

When, at last, I can't stand this way any longer without a fear of tumbling over, I bring down the other foot, and my boot creaks like anything.

On this the near twin puckers up its nose and sniffs. I immediately become transfixed again, and suffer agonies of suspense whilst I watch the puckers straighten out. Then I breathe again, and going in for extra cautiousness, kick the table.

At the noise the four eyes of the twin division open simultaneously, as though worked on one wire, and rivet themselves on my face, stretched across the table towards them, and wearing an expression of such concentrated agony, rage, and despair, that it is quite too much for the twins, and the lines of their youthful countenances spread out perpendicularly, like the gutta-percha heads you buy at the corner shop in the Lowther, when you pinch them under the chin.

The next moment I am chanting, "Hush-a-bye baby, have you any wool? Father's gone a-hunting on a tree-top!" in a persuasive tone of voice, whilst I

flip the fingers of my right hand as an accompaniment, and rub my shin with the left.

These must be fools of twins, as far as music is concerned!—they don't see it.

I therefore rock them in their little cot, and jolt one twin's head up against the other with a rattling sound, like eggs going at a trot in a basket to market. But even this does not soothe them.

Under these circumstances, I come to the conclusion they will, perhaps, calm down if carried about a bit; but it is a harder thing to carry a couple of twins, both



"In arms."

together, than any one who has never carried half a twins at a time has any notion of, and the way I hold them gives them an opportunity of pulling and hauling at my whiskers in a style I have been unaccustomed to.

There was a time, during the Crimean War, when a

Russian officer, whom I subsequently slew, expressed a desire to take me by the nose, but probably that was not a case in point. As it is, I am now being similarly assaulted, and have also had a dab in either eye. Indeed, the question is, What will happen next? unless—I'll try the feeding-bottle.

Hitherto we have only got one feeding-bottle between the twins—naturally supposing that they would have taken their food fairly and squarely turn about—but they won't. When one twin gets the bottle the other howls, and there's no way of choking off the howler but by gagging him with the india-rubber feeder, on which the other fellow pipes up like one o'clock.



"Aha! the bottle!"

It is the case now; but whilst No. 1 twin is wolfing up his share, I shake a rattle with all my might in the face of No. 2, which has the effect of stunning him &

bit till his turn comes, when I rattle up the other chap till he seems half dazed.

After these proceedings, both twins being temporarily lulled, I get them back into their cot, and unbutton my waistcoat and gasp awhile.

They continue quiet. If I could open the window and get a breath of air, I might go on looking up the ills of infancy in the "Encyclopædia" with some degree of calmness.

The twins have closed their eyes. I will.....gentlyThat's right.....And now for the "Encyclopædia."

I suppose the Girls will be back soon. Really and truly, I am not getting on so very badly; but, after all, tact is what is wanted in these matters—simply tact.....What's that?

A beast of a big buzzing bluebottle fly has come in through the open window.



“Singularly incomplete, this work.”

I watch this bluebottle with interest. As I supposed, he goes for the twins.

He settles on the off twin's nose. The off twin lunges out at him, and he beats a retreat.

The off twin sinks back into slumber. Heaven be thanked!

The bluebottle returns and settles on the near twin's nose. The near twin lunges, and gives his brother one in the ear. On this, the off twin lunges out and howls.

I oblige with "Cease, rude Boreas," and "The Red, White, and Blue," and peace is restored.

Then I look round for the bluebottle. He is quiet just now, but I'm not going to put up with any of his nonsense. Let him look out.

Aha!

He returns and hovers playfully round his victims. Which nose is he on for now? Let him look out!

Whilst I fix my gentleman with my eye, I take out my silk handkerchief, and at a critical moment I flip.

Merciful powers! what have I done? Have I marked a twin for life? And which was it?

They are both howling at the top of their voices.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE MAJOR HAS IT OUT WITH THE
BLUEBOTTLE.

IT may here be casually mentioned that I (Major

Penny), during the Indian Revolt, was the first person to whom the notion of blowing Sepoys from the mouths of guns first occurred. Others may have gone



Rage and lury.

about taking the credit, but it was I (Major Penny) who said right off before anybody, "Blow 'em to smithereens! The only way to quell the mutiny is to blow 'em to smithereens."

I do not exactly quote the above as a case in point; it is more with a view to showing that when a mutiny is in question, and you want a queller, you might do worse than send for yours obediently.

* * * * *

To begin with, I am naturally anxious to ascertain whether I really did flick a bit off one of the twins' noses when aiming at the bluebottle, but a careful investigation proves this impression to have been **errone-**

ous. On the whole, I am not sorry that it is not so—not only on the twins' account, but because it would have been deuced awkward to have satisfactorily accounted for the circumstance on the Girls' return.

Without going lengthily into detail, I may observe that the circumstance might have tended to lower my system of quelling in the Girls' eyes.

As it is, seeing that I expect either Bathsheba, Cassandra, or Ursula to return immediately, it is necessary that the twins should be silenced at once, and the only question that remains to be answered is, How?

I observe that inordinate gluttony is the besetting sin of both twins alike, and once more I deem it advisable to allow them an opportunity, as Mr. Cruikshank would say, to "console themselves with the bottle."

The fact that there is but one bottle between them acts prejudicially in this instance, and whilst the lucky one pulls away with an expression on him resembling a Highland piper discoursing his national music, envy and uncharitableness goads the other twin well-nigh to frenzy, and he claws, in a futile fashion, at the coveted object, and bewails his paplessness in the shrillest treble.

I therefore vary the monotony by letting twin No. 2 have a pull, and endeavour to lull No. 1's suspicion of foul play by substituting my thumb in the place of the sucker, at which, thinking no guile, he wires in for a period, and is perfectly contented.

Whilst occupied by this strategic movement, it occurs to me that my position, viewed by an unsympathetic stranger, might appear somewhat undignified.

"Major Penny," I mentally ejaculate, "you who have

led men to action—who have stormed giddy heights amidst blinding fire, and have hacked your way through forests of deadly steel—to what occupation have you come at last? Major Penny, if any one should catch a glimpse of you under present circumstances, he would smile.”

But, on second thoughts, how poor and paltry would be his triumph! Did not the great Alfred unbend to bake cakes and burn them? Did not.....

No. I twin is beginning to notice a want of something in the substitute I have provided. He had better have the bottle again, and his brother take a pull at the other thumb.

So! The exchange has been swiftly effected. General joy at present prevails. Both twins are peaceful now. Sleep, sweet sleep, steals gently o'er their senses. I'm getting the cramp with stooping, but no matter.

* * * * *

I have done it. I have withdrawn my thumb with a slow and cautious movement, leaving a round hole where it has been, but the unconscious twin slumbers placidly.

After all, there are many kinds of victories. There is the victory of the diplomatist. There is—— *That confounded bluebottle come back again!*

I thought so! Would you? No, you don't!

He is making straight for the noses of my young friends, but I am too quick for him.

He retreats, and I follow on his trail, like Mr. Fenimore Cooper's Chingaghook (whose name, I trust, I am spelling properly).

He makes a tour of the room, on finding that he cannot effect his purpose, and lodges on the mantelpiece. I do the Chingaghook business.

He is in my power! Aha!

I've missed him!

He makes another tour of the apartment, pretending he doesn't know I'm in it. Let him beware! This trifling is ill-timed.

Here he is alighting on a side-table. I repeat the Chingaghookery.

With bated breath I take a deadly aim!



Destruction.

He's up again, and I am following in hot pursuit.
Crash!!!

I had not noticed another side-table whilst urging on my wild career—a table littered over with Bathsheba's confounded old china cups and saucers.

I bear down on them like an avalanche, and in

another moment fell destruction has been wrought, and I am sprawling amongst the ruins.

I get up and gaze upon the field of battle. I collect scraps and hold them together, hoping they will stick by magic, whilst I reflect on the state of mind Bathsheba will be in when she finds out what has happened, and the trouble I shall have in framing a dignified explanation of the business, unless——

No, that were unmanly; and, besides, I don't think it would be believed. I *cannot* lay it on the twins.



Meditation.

The twins, it may be mentioned, have been awakened by the noise, and are now howling again as hard as ever.

Meanwhile the brute of a bluebottle is buzzing away joyously, and——

Rat-a-tat-tat-a-tat-tat!

A knock at the door! The Girls returned, no doubt.



Deception.

which? Probably Bathsheba; and, as yet, I have not a word ready in the way of explanation.

Supposing, to gain time, I pocket the bits, I have. Now for it!

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR PUTS SOMETHING IN HIS COAT-TAIL POCKET.

GOOD gracious!

It is not my sister Bathsheba, as I at first supposed, or one of the other Girls. It is neither more nor less than Lady Taltorkington, of Taltorkington Towers, one of the leading qualities of the neighbourhood,

whose carriage stands without, and whose footman has knocked till he was tired, when Lady Taltorkington herself has taken her turn, and has the knocker in her hand when I drag the door open suddenly, and as nearly as possible throw her on her nose in the passage.



“Hallo!”

Next moment I am apologizing profusely, and trying to hide the feeding-bottle with one hand, whilst I offer the other to her ladyship to shake.

Her ladyship seems a little taken aback, on the whole, but yet smiles sweetly and asks after the Girls, on which, to carry off the detail of the bottle, the india-rubber tubing to which persists in wagging to and fro, behind me, like the pendulum of a clock, I rush into uncalled-for particulars, and give a history of the Girls' ailments for the last month or two.

I also beg and entreat of her to come in, as though

it were a matter of life or death to me that she should, praying in my heart all the while that she won't. It is needless to say she does, and settles into a seat, as though for years.

By a sleight-of-hand trick, which I honestly believe



"So glad!"

to be superior to anything ever attempted by Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke, I get the bottle away behind a work-box on the top of the new piano Cassandra is buying on the hire system, and glide gracefully into a chair opposite her ladyship.

Crack!

* * * * *

Instinctively I should have known by the sound even, if not by sensations of not too pleasurable a nature, that the tea-pot was continuing to come to sorrow in consequence of my sitting on it; but it will perhaps call attention unnecessarily to the circumstances if I alter my position.

Crack!

It has gone off again of its own accord, without any additional movement on my part, but I continue to dilate on Ursula's toothache without a pause.

Her ladyship does not appear to follow me. She, on the contrary, looks as though the noise puzzled her.

She says, "What ever was that?"

I say "What was what?" as naturally as possible, and break a little more china turning. Then, thinking it best at this juncture to appear to look as though I were trying to hear something, although I had heard nothing hitherto, I add, "Hush! what can it be?"



The guilty conscience.

A deathlike silence of one moment ensues, as all the china breakable has been broken by this time, and then next moment another sound of a most mysterious character is audible.

On hearing it, Lady Taltorkington appears to prick up her ears, and I too am singularly interested. It is, in fact, a sound as of the dripping of water blended

with subdued music partaking of the nature of the Æolian harp.

When I thoroughly realize that it is the contents of the twins' feeding-bottle dripping steadily down among the machinery of Cassandra's piano on the hire system, I writhe covertly, and use (inaudible) bad language.

With a mental effort equal to several Talleyrands under high pressure, I observe, "The rain on the roof of the conservatory."



"It's just like a baby!"

Her ladyship shakes her head dubiously. "I don't hear it now at all," she says.

Thank goodness! Who wanted her to? Suddenly, however, she starts.

"It's just like a baby!" she exclaims. "How extraordinary!"

As she speaks, I for the first time become conscious of the piping (bagpiping rather) music peculiar to those ghastly twins, for one of whom, probably, the

bluebottle is just now making it warm, without fear of interference.

But how is it possible to tell the truth to her ladyship without telling the humiliating story in its entirety of that unhappy woman Twopenny's injudicious marriage and ill-advised twin legacy?

I therefore dissemble. I say,

"Baby! Good gracious! What an idea!"

Immediately on making this observation the other twin joins in the harmony, and the two pleasant young voices swell the chorus.

Once, however, having strayed from the path of strict veracity, I find myself engulfed in a vortex of untruthfulness, as it were, and plunge wildly into the weather, and talk of yesterday's glorious sunshine as something wholly unprecedented in the experience of man.

In the course of time, finding I have worked out the sunshine topic, which, after all, as a topic, has not been much of a success, I am turning over in my mind whether Cassandra's nettle-rash last autumn, or the atrocities in Bulgaria, would go best as a follower, when a loud bump on the floor of the next room brings me to a full stop.

Hallo!

What has happened now? The twins can't have got up, and by their united efforts upset another table?

A deathlike silence follows the bump in the next room. It is the sort of silence which holds you spell-bound when you are sitting for your photograph; during which you think over all the incidents of your

early life, as people say a man does who is on the point of drowning.

There is a deathlike silence in this room also, broken but by one faint sound—the steady drip from the twins' bottle into the interior of the hire system.

This suspense is terrible. What is going to happen next?

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR TAKES SOMETHING OUT OF HIS POCKET.

WHEN I casually mention that I, Major Penny, have in my time wallowed knee-deep in the gore of battle-fields, it may surprise you to hear that, at this moment, I find myself almost unnerved.

Whilst rushing to the breach amidst showers of deadly lead, I own I have occasionally asked myself with some curiosity what may be waiting for me within. In heading a forlorn hope, indeed, the idea not unfrequently suggests itself; yet, I repeat, that that suspense is nothing to the suspense now.

This may possibly be accounted for to some extent by the novelty of the situation. At the call of duty, in foreign parts, I have in my time made short work of a lot of blacks, without noticing that the exercise in any way interfered with my appetite or my sleep; but if

anything has happened to one or both of those twins, I don't quite know what I shall do.

Extraordinary to relate, her ladyship appears not to notice my agitation. It is true that this may be owing to the fact of the twins having subsided into silence.

And this does not at first occur to me. To me the twins' silence is wholly unaccountable. If they are alive and awake, they ought to be on full pipe. I must and will know the worst.

I am rising to my feet with this intention, when her ladyship, laying her hand upon my arm, arrests my progress. She says,

"I see, Major, you agree with me, and I may rely on your support."

It would appear from this observation that her ladyship has been talking for some time past without my noticing the circumstance.

I have already told you, I believe, that Lady Taltorkington is one of the leading qualities of our neighbourhood. I may also add that it has been my one aim and object for years past to cultivate her acquaintance, to which statement I may also add that this is her first visit to my humble dwelling.

I wonder whether she will ever come again? Meanwhile, although I haven't a notion what the deuce she has been talking about, perhaps I had better say something.

I therefore smile cheerfully, and respond, "If my support is of any value, your ladyship may depend on me—to the utmost."

"I was sure I could, Major Penny," she says with

warmth, as she produces a note-book. "What shall we say?"

I don't quite follow this. It begins to look deucedly like a subscription.

I try to arouse myself, but am incapable of any mental effort, and instead listen intently for the slightest noise in the next room.

All is silence there. Her ladyship goes on tackling me.

"Come, Major," she says, "you mean to surprise us all, I can see. Three figures, eh.

By all that's horrible, it *is* a subscription she is on to! And three figures! I like that.

I make a desperate effort to save myself, and say, "Let me understand, now, what is the exact nature of the—the proposition, as it stands."

Her ladyship looks surprised and slightly offended.

"I thought I had fully explained," she says.

"Oh, perfectly," I hasten to reply. "I was only thinking whether, owing to certain circumstances which it would fatigue you to go into, I should be altogether justified in—in entering into the matter as I could wish, did I—I—only consult my own inclinations."

Considering that I had not the remotest notion what she had been talking about, I rather fancy this sentence is nicely turned.

"My dear Major," she says, "you astonish me. I had indeed relied upon your aid on the platform."

She wants to get me on a platform now. Next it will be a tight-rope, I suppose.

"Since, however, you will not take a personal part

I must, I presume, be content with your subscription. What shall I say?"

It is a subscription: that is quite plain now.

"I have so many calls upon me just at this moment, but if a guinea is of any service——"

"A guinea, Major!" she exclaims. "Oh, I had hoped for so much more!"

Confound her hopes! I think I'm sufficiently victimized as it is.

"But," she continues, "it is to be considered as a quarterly payment, of course. Shall I take it now?"

This is highway robbery, but I can't see my way out of it on easier terms, and I would do anything almost, just at this moment, to get rid of her.

The silence in the next room is tomb-like.

* * * * *



"Here's a go!"

Whew! She has gone, and my one pound one with her. Though the subject is a painful one, I can scarcely

refrain from a smile when I reflect on the way in which I bestow my charity. There is an open-handed vagueness about it that really is refreshing from its novelty. But hush! How about those twins?

I hold my breath as I turn the handle of the door, and glare affrightedly around.

It is as I half expected. The worst has happened.

The cradle is lying wrong side up, and the twins are underneath.



To the rescue!

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH CHAOS PREVAILS, AND THE GIRLS COME BACK AGAIN.

IN deadly terror I remove the cradle, the blankets, the pillows, etcetera, and arrive at last at the twins. They are lying on their little noses, motionless.

As I stretch forth my hand and seize them, I hear a footfall in the passage. The Girls returned, perhaps. Well, they had better know all—— The deuce!

* * * * *

It isn't the Girls. It is that confounded woman come back again.



“Unhand me!”

“Major!”

“Unhand me!” I shriek, and rushing back, fling myself against the door.

By the way, I trust she won't think I'm mad!

There is no doubt about it.

She does think I am mad—probably dangerous.

She has flown from the house, and, looking after her, I see her gesticulating wildly to the coachman, and, seemingly, telling him of her narrow escape from the raging maniac!

Stay, though! Perhaps she knows the truth, and is on her way to the police-station. In a short time the myrmidons of the law may be here asking for explanations relative to the smothered babes——



Never!

Good gracious!

There's nothing at all smothered in that now welcome sound. They were actually only asleep, then,



Away—away!

all the time. And twins can, seemingly, slumber wrong side up, and extinguished by a cradle. There is yet something to learn in this world, even for a

Major who has headed a charge on the ensanguined field of battle.

Pipe up, my merry men! Don't mind how much row you make—pipe up!

Meanwhile, before the Girls come back, let me try to set things a little bit straight. At present, our usually orderly apartments wear something of the aspect of the stage of a theatre during the pantomime season after a pelting scene. The first thing is to



More mischief.

make sure there are no fragments of broken china lying about—or, stay, let me first look at the piano.

Confound this bottle! It is spoiling something else now. Inadvertently I have placed it on the top of one of Ursula's water-colour sketches. The deuce!

* * * * *

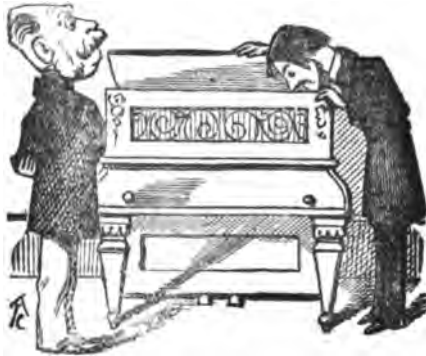
Evidently I have adopted a wrong system in trying to wipe it with my pocket-handkerchief. Here are

half a forest and the top of a mountain come off, and the sea has run over the margin.

There'll be a row about this.

* * * * *

There is a row about it going on at this moment, and some other rows about other little matters. The Girls have come back in a body, and the first thing Bathsheba's eye lit upon was a bit of her tea-pot, half hidden under the leg of the table. Meanwhile Ursula is weeping over her water-colours, and Cassandra, with tears in her eyes, is polishing the top of her piano. Luckily she does not know that anything has happened to the inside.



"Hallo!"

We are interrupted at this moment by a knock. Of course it is the new nurse whom Ursula went to inquire about, and who is to come on immediately, and high time it is she did.

* * * * *

This is awkward! It is not the nurse. It is a young man come to tune the piano.

I dissemble whilst he raises the lid. But when I hear him say, "Hallo!" it occurs to me I might as well go for a constitutional, and I go.



CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THERE IS MORE UNPLEASANTNESS.

I MUST confess, as I continue my walk, and the humble peasants I encounter by the way move on one side and respectfully salute me—I must confess I cannot refrain from asking myself whether I, Major Penny, who have led Her Majesty's forces (or, at any rate, a portion of them) to action, have not recently been placed in a somewhat undignified position.

It cannot be denied that the business of nursing (particularly in the case of twins) more naturally devolves upon a member of the other sex, whom it does not seem to worry quite so much, or, anyhow, they don't own to it.

I have been perusing this morning, with much pleasure, an account of the reading of a paper by Mrs. W. E. Gladstone, at the Domestic Economy Congress at Birmingham, in which the writer urged strongly that the elementary principles of nursing should be added

to the subjects already taught in schools, so that they might become part of the regular instruction of young girls. A child might be so taught to nurse as to give her what was really a high and holy aim.

These are my sentiments too, and it is to be regretted that the Girls—Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula—were not thus instructed when young.

The ribald scoffer might perchance suggest that,



At it again!

hitherto, they have not stood in any particular need of such knowledge, and that, in the ordinary course of events, they were by no means ever likely to.

But a truce to irrelevance. Afflicted as we are by twins requiring an abnormal amount of nursing, an experienced nurse is a *sine quâ non*; and, from what I can learn, Mrs. Tootsy is the nurse of all nurses for us!

Indeed, from what has reached me, it would appear that Mrs. Tootsy would have been equal to triplets, and is reported to have said that she had been in a

family with whom twins were a mere matter of periodical recurrence.

With the aid of so valuable a person, I feel that I can manage the two Twopennys without trouble.

As I approach the house on my return, all is calm. I let myself in quietly and look around. In the passage is a bandbox bearing the name of Tootsy.

Impelled by natural curiosity, I raise the lid, and discover a large black bottle, doubtless containing soothing cordial for the twins. I will taste it.

I have. It's gin!

At this moment the rustle of a skirt behind me attracts my attention, and a strange voice exclaims,

"What: you're at it again, are you?"

It is Mrs. Tootsy, who evidently does not know who I am.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH TOOTSY GOES IT.

I HAVE serious doubts with regard to the woman Tootsy.

To a certain extent I am willing to allow the woman Tootsy might have been justified in addressing an unknown person she found sipping out of her gin-bottle with some amount of abruptness.

The words, "You're at it again, are you?" although they might be taken to imply a foreknowledge on her

part of my being in the habit of being at it whensoever an occasion offered, might not, however, necessarily mean quite as much. Considered as a mere ordinary figure of speech, the observation loses something of its offensiveness; yet, I repeat, I have serious doubts with regard to the woman Tootsy.

Does, or does not, the woman Tootsy look up to and respect me, as a person in her position ought to look up to and respect her employer?

I don't think it.

With all the sternness I can call into my features at a moment's notice, the spirits having taken a little of my breath away, I turn upon Tootsy, at the same time replacing the cork in the bottle, and ask whether the bottle is hers.

"It ain't yours, anyhow," says Tootsy.

There is truth in this, though it be blended with a certain amount of disrespect. I therefore say, with quiet dignity, "I do not dispute the fact, but I ask for further information."

"You hand it over, will you?" says Tootsy. "I don't know how long you've been at it, but there's a third gone!"

"If you intend to insinuate that I have taken——" I begin with what I trust is pardonable warmth, but she breaks in upon me.

She says, "Well, of all the barefaced! Why, I see you with my own eyes!"

I feel I am losing dignity if this goes on much longer, and must at once put matters on their proper footing. I therefore say,

"You do not appear to be aware, Mrs. Tootsy, that

you are addressing the master of this house. I—I am Major Penny!"

"I'm sure," says Mrs. Tootsy, with candour, "I didn't know who you was or who you wasn't, but I don't see what business you've got interfering with my things, and it's what I never did, and never will, put up with from any person alive!"

In making this declaration Mrs. Tootsy raises her voice, and the sound of it brings the Girls out into the passage.

As it is my custom to avoid personal altercations of any kind before the Girls, I deem it, at this point, politic to cut the argument short with an affable smile, and say, "Certainly, Mrs. Tootsy, it's all a mistake, so we won't say any more about it."

Mrs. Tootsy's face speaks volumes, but she happily remains silent, contenting herself by tipping up the bottle, and forming a close calculation of the quantity missing.

This conduct on the part of Tootsy is, I must own, anything but what it ought to be, and I have the strongest possible desire to then and there order her out of the house. But how can I do so without entering into details—and before the Girls that would be impossible.

Besides, this nurse has been too much trouble to get, for us to part lightly with her.

The only thing, then, left for me to do is, for the present, to curb my indignation and to bide my time.

Meanwhile Tootsy's behaviour continues to be trying. One of Tootsy's rules—and one that must be broken on no account—is, that Tootsy shall not be

disturbed at her meals. Tootsy's meals are four per diem, with hot meat at each and bottled stout at two of them, and between whiles at irregular periods.



Tootsy's meal-time.

If the twins have convulsions during Tootsy's meals, it is of no consequence. She is not to be disturbed.

I have the misfortune to leave my hat and gloves in the room where she is dining, and don't dare to go in and fetch them.

Fortunately I am unobserved, so there is less loss of dignity about it; but I sit on the bench in the hall three-quarters of an hour, waiting till Tootsy has quite done, before I can obtain possession of my property and go out for a walk.

In her treatment of the twins, Tootsy is, to my thinking, peculiar; but as I am informed, upon the best authority (Tootsy's own), that she is a woman of great experience, I am afraid to make a suggestion.

I can't help thinking, however, if the eldest twin is shaken up much more, something will be displaced in his youthful interior.

Again, although I own the twins' noses were a dis-



Tootsy's shake-up.

appointment to me when I first saw them—for ours is a family of noses with some character about them—I have doubts respecting the moulding process adopted by Tootsy.

According to Tootsy, you may put any shape you like upon a baby's nose, if you begin early enough, and tweak it hard and often enough in the required direction. If, in the case of these unhappy twins, Tootsy has taken the handle of Aldgate pump as her model, I think the noses already give great promise of resemblance.

But, of all things I have to complain of, I complain most of Tootsy's want of respect.

I have just been on a tour of inspection in the

nursery, and have made a few passing remarks, which have been received with snorts of defiance, in a low but determined tone.

I am now taking my afternoon constitutional, and



Tootsy's great nose trick.

observe some surprise in the expression of persons whom I encounter.

I wonder as I walk. Then presently a boy makes an unseemly remark in the rear of me. I turn quickly, and catch a glimpse of something white which turns with me. I turn again quickly, and the white thing turns quicker.

The boy laughs—other people laugh.

I get very hot and angry.

The mysterious something is beyond my reach.

I make a wild snatch at it. Good heavens! **who has dared—**



Gross indignity.

It is a duster, and it has been attached to my coat-tail by a pin!

As I occupy a position directly in the centre of the village high street, endeavouring to get hold of the confounded pin's head, molten fury fills my breast.

If this is Tootsy's work, let her look out.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR SUFFERS MUCH.

I HAVE one simple question to ask. Am I—Major Penny master of my own house, or am I not master of my own house?

I don't know that there is any particular necessity for me to pause for a reply. Rather let me reply myself by another question. If I am not master of my own house, who the deuce is? Probably—and, at any rate, apparently—the woman Tootsy.

Of course, I acknowledge that it was an absolute necessity that the twins should have a proper nurse, and I am also willing to admit that it is only fair that the nurse should be allowed, to a great extent, full power in her proper sphere—the nursery; but there are limits to everything, even Tootsy, and Tootsy goes beyond hers, and keeps on at it.

The woman Tootsy pervades the entire establishment. In the kitchen a perpetual civil war rages betwixt her and the cook, the partially smothered fury of which reaches the upstairs rooms in gusts, as it were, when the dining-room door opens for a moment to allow of the passage of portions of our dinner.

The woman Tootsy, cook tells me, won't leave her saucepans alone, and the truth of this statement has already been twice exemplified by the substitution at table of pap for bread sauce.

A tendency to coddling is possibly natural enough in a nurse, but there are, on an average, on the simmer, four saucepans, two jugs, and a kettle in the nursery alone, besides one or two downstairs in the kitchen.

But this is not all. When the woman Tootsy first came, I generously bade her order all that was necessary of our chemist and grocer. As the Girls and I had not the remotest notion what might be necessary, and did not want to be asked conundrums on the subject, I thought that that was the wisest course.

But the results are alarming. When I mention that I have, during a casual and clandestine glance round, become, for the first time, aware of the existence of two kinds of Infant Preservatives, and that infants may have a choice of food made by Hard, Neave, Nestle, Ridge, Savory & Moore, and about half a dozen others, and that the Twopenny Twins have



"Can this be good for twins?"

alternate tucks-out at all of them, you may form some idea what the chemist and grocer's bills will be like this quarter, but I'll be hanged if I can!

And you may add to the packets of food, boxes of babies' powders innumerable, and everything in the way of soothing syrups and elixirs which the mind of man or woman ever conceived, or the stomach of infancy is capable of containing.

Gazing on these regiments of boxes and bottles, my eye alights on a formidable glass jar, on which the

words Epsom Salts, in imposing capitals, arrest my attention, and I own I am staggered.

I do not profess to know everything about babies, though I have recently read up the subject to some considerable extent. But I protest against Epsom Salts being applied—and, apparently, in gigantic doses—to twins of so tender an age.



“It’s rather strong

How, then, shall I proceed? At this moment I cannot quite decide, and I hear Tootsy’s step upon the stairs.

My first inclination is to heave the bottle through the open window, and scatter its fragments far and wide; my second, to escape with it to my own room, and that I do. Now I shall have time to settle a course of action for the future.

* * * * *

I have always looked upon Epsom Salts as an ad-

mirable medicine, and it is one which I have been in the habit of taking periodically for years past; and that reminds me I am at present out of salts. There can surely be no great harm—

* * * * *

These are stronger salts than I have been in the habit of taking. Possibly they are Tootsy's private and particular, and being in the trade, as it were, she may have opportunities of obtaining her own private and particular, pure and unadulterated.—Bless me! what's that?

The gong for lunch. I had no idea it was lunch-time, or I should not have taken such a dose! And we've liver and bacon, too!—a dish to which I don't mind owning I am remarkably partial.

We are at lunch—the Girls and I—Bathsheba facing me, Cassandra on my right, Ursula on my left; the liver and bacon occupying the centre of the table. The Girls also are partial to the dish. They would not have it publicly spread about, of course; and at the dinner-table, were any one dining with us, the thing would be altogether out of the question; but here and now—

* * * * *

The Girls have all had a second help. I, too, am about—Good gracious!

There are shrill cries upon the landing. The woman Tootsy's voice is distinctly audible. She says some one has been at her bottles, and has taken away the oxalic acid!

There are moments in which we are said to live

years. The moment I occupy looking for my hat is one of them.

And the nearest stomach-pump is at the doctor's, a mile off!

G-g-g-good gracious!



“Oh, dear! oh, dear! if any one's took it!”

Promptitude has ever been one of my most striking characteristics. I have shown it on the field of battle, and I show it now.

The Girls scream in chorus, “For mercy's sake, say what has happened!” But I have no time for explanations. What I have got to do is to run!

I run like mad! I drop my hat. I have not time to pick it up. The oxalic acid is commingling in a lively fashion with the liver and bacon, and the effects are terrible.

I accomplish half the distance, and am on the point of sinking to the earth, when I descry the doctor in his gig, and hail him frantically.



"G-g-g-good gracious!"

* * * * *

I have now been an inmate of the doctor's house for over an hour, and have taken strong emetics, and otherwise have had a time of it. The doctor is now going to bring what remains of me home in his gig.

* * * * *

On the doorstep an excited group. The Girls! They seem delighted about something. Bathsheba exclaims, "It's all right! It was a false alarm. Mrs. Tootsy has found the oxalic acid bottle in her cupboard, and nobody is a bit the worse!"

This is almost a joke in its way. But it might make me look ridiculous before the Girls if they knew what I had gone through.

I must beg of the doctor not to tell.

—●—

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR TRIES THE SOOTHING SYSTEM.

AS from the circumstance of my not having previously referred to Dawkins you may possibly be unaware that there *is* a Dawkins in my establishment, I hasten to make a statement.

There is no doubt whatever as to Dawkins's existence, and if you lived in the same house, she would let you know it.



Dawkins.

Dawkins officiates as cook in my establishment, and she fills up her spare time as chambermaid and parlourmaid, as we only keep one servant. Dawkins's culinary feats are marvellous, though not in the sense you might suppose; and what is more marvellous

still is the way in which the Girls and I have put up with them for years.

The impression upon the Girls' minds and mine is, that if Dawkins were to desert us, chaos would ensue as a matter of course, and Dawkins seems to share this opinion.

It is, therefore, Dawkins's habit periodically to come to the conclusion that she has been too long in the place, and that a change would be desirable; and it is then our habit to conciliate her to the utmost in our power, and beg she won't think of it, to which at length she consents somewhat reluctantly, and we breathe again.

Dawkins having been with us a good long while, now knows our ways; and this may also be said of us with respect to Dawkins's ways; and we take particular care not to put her out of any of her ways, because, when she is put out, terrible things occur to the food.

When the Twins calamity first occurred to us, Dawkins had to be conciliated like anything, but she has never yet got quite straight again. She was very nearly getting straight when Tootsy happened, but now it's awful.

I take it Tootsy, hitherto, has been pretty well in the habit of having it all her own way wherever she has been; but in Dawkins Tootsy has caught a Tartar, and war is waged and things broken all day long.

The one aim and end of Tootsy's existence, according to Dawkins, is to "mess up" basins; whilst, according to Tootsy, the one aim and end of Dawkins's is to chuck Tootsy's twin preparations in the dust-hole.

Whilst engaged with my private correspondence in my study, I require silence. My correspondence is somewhat one-sided, being chiefly devoted to the composition of letters to the "Times," of which I retain copies to be sent again, if—as is, I may say, invariably the case—the first one is not put in, or to be addressed to the editor of our local journal, who, though kept comparatively in the background by the exercise of hatred and malice, appears to me to possess powers of appreciation, conspicuous by their absence in other quarters.

The silence necessary for the exercise of the higher mental faculties called forth by this correspondence is, however, since the twins and Tootsy almost wholly denied me. The fact of the room above being the twins' dormitory may account for the perpetual rocking of the cradle at such times as Tootsy is not engaged in pacing the length and breadth of the apartment like a wild beast in its cage, or at such other times as the twins, during Tootsy's absence (probably to mess up basins in the kitchen), are not on full cry.

Giving up the study as the very last place in the world suitable to study in, I take my pen and ink and paper into the drawing-room, and request the Girls, as a particular favour, to leave off chatting whilst I am at work.

The Girls subsiding into faint whispers, I dip my pen in the ink, and become suddenly conscious of the existence of partially smothered ferocity in the lower regions, accompanied by damage done to plates and dishes.

Really, this is not to be borne!

I throw down my pen, rush into the passage, and summon Dawkins.

"Dawkins," I say, "I want to speak to you."

"I want to speak to you, too," says Dawkins. "I should like to leave this house, if you have no objection."



Soothing Dawkins.

This is rather a staggerer, so I think it advisable to soothe Dawkins.

I say, "Dawkins, what have you to complain of?"

"What!" shrieks Dawkins, "what! Why, everything—particular that Tootsy!"

I think Dawkins requires more soothing on a different plan. I therefore invite her into my study, and impress upon her that although it is not advisable to let Tootsy hear what we think of her just yet awhile, I myself think very little of her indeed, and, what is more, do not intend to put up with her nonsense much longer. These sentiments would appear to afford some satisfaction to Dawkins, and she retreats to the lower regions with a significant wink.

A minute afterwards Tootsy taps at the door and says, "You'll excuse me, sir, but this can't go on."

I say, "What can't, Mrs. Tootsy?"

She says, "That woman's owdaciousness."

Of course I know she means Dawkins, but as I am not positive Dawkins is not listening at the moment, I content myself with a mysterious nod.



Soothing Tootsy.

This, however, is not enough for Tootsy. She raises her voice, and says she can't stand it, and, what is more, she won't!

I assure her, in a whisper, that there is no occasion, as it won't last long.

This is diplomatic. I don't tell her that it is she who is likely to be the first to go.

But she won't have diplomacy. She says, "Either that woman leaves, or I do."

To which I say, "Certainly."

To which she says, "Which is it to be, then?"

To which I say, "Why need you ask, my dear Mrs. Tootsy?"

To which she says, "I want a straightforward answer."

I am on the point of giving an answer, which is to be as straightforward as possible under the circumstances, when the door flies wide open, and Dawkins enters with clenched fists.

There will be some unpleasantness, I expect.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH THE SOOTHING SYSTEM FAILS.

WHEN I said there would be unpleasantness, I was right.

There has been. Nay, there is still. I find myself at this moment occupying a position somewhat analogous to that of a railway buffer in a case of collision, and I have not only to meet the arguments adduced with calmness and composure, but at the same time to keep my legs.

The difficulty of so doing, as both Dawkins and Tootsy are what may be termed substantial women, with a tendency to bounce, is extreme, and I find myself in the middle of conciliatory observations with my boots in the air, and my body at angles not easily re-

concilable with the proper maintenance of equilibrium. I also bump my head rather sharply against the wall.

The substance of the argument put forward, at the top of Dawkins's voice, is, that she sees this is no longer the house for her; whilst the conclusion arrived at by Tootsy, at the top of *her* voice, is, that no power



Soothing everybody.

on earth would induce her to remain another moment beneath my roof. There are also casual allusions to the deceitfulness of double-faced deceivers, and to a pack of meddling Molly-coddles, which I pass over as unworthy of serious consideration.

By this time the Girls have gathered around, and Bathsheba exclaims, "Brother! how dare those women talk to you like that?"

This is an unfortunate remark on the part of Bathsheba, as Tootsy and Dawkins immediately turn round upon her and indignantly demand whom she means by women.

Cassandra here says, "How dare you talk to your master in such a way? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

This is also rather an unfortunate remark on the part of Cassandra, as it is immediately met with an observation to the effect that the master in question would be all the better for a lot more talking to, and a precious good shaking as well.

On this, Ursula, carried away by very natural indignation, says, "Brother, turn them both out of the house this very moment!"

Probably, on the whole, this is the most unfortunate remark of all three.

* * * * *

Dawkins and Tootsy are no longer beneath my roof. It is not absolutely necessary to go into details. There may, or may not, have been a certain amount of unseemliness, accompanied by loss of dignity. In such cases there usually is.

One thing is certain, they are both gone. Gone, never to return.

After the excitement of the events that have just transpired, naturally succeeds a period of comparative reaction, in which the idea occurs to somebody that a new nurse will have to be found for those twins, and that (they are both on full pipe at this moment) pretty sharply.

Another idea occurs to somebody else immediately afterwards that it was rather awkward Dawkins should have left to-day, as we expect company to dinner.

On this I say, "We must all put our shoulders to the wheel."

"What!" says Bathsheba, "before we roast it?"

The company has come. The company is Pincher—Captain Pincher, my old companion in arms—and a man whom any other man might be proud to know.

I have no hesitation in saying that I am proud to



Pincher.

know Pincher, and I look upon it as an honour to my mahogany for Pincher to put his legs under it. I have frequently said as much to the Girls.

As to what the Girls have said in reply, that is immaterial. In questions of suitability as regards men, I have observed that the judgment of girls is not reliable. Therefore—though I have reason to believe that the Girls do not value Pincher's society as much as they should do—I am thoroughly determined that there shall be no more misalliances in our family, and that if any one of the Girls wants to get married, now is the time and here is the man!

We are at table. The meal has been prepared. We have prepared it. I myself have read the directions for roasting veal from the cookery book, and the Girls have acted under my instructions. I feel proud of the way in which this veal has been roasted, and my pride culminates in the happy blending of the ingredients with which it has been stuffed, and which, even tasted raw, though suety in parts, is, on the whole, a combination of unusual merit.

It is extraordinary how careless an ordinary cook is in the matter of ingredients. A search of the hitherto sacred precincts ruled over by Dawkins has resulted in the discovery that we are out of almost everything requisite for veal stuffing; and, mark my words, if Dawkins had still been here, the stuffing would have been made without them. As it is, they are not omitted. They have been fetched—some of them a considerable distance. We are all of us rather knocked up by the time the roast veal is ready, but we are proud of what we have done.

Pincher is here, as, I think, I have already observed, and I get him artfully on to the subject of his favourite joints, and next throw in roast veal in a loose and careless kind of way. On which Pincher, apparently not seeing my drift, says candidly he prefers any other joint. This is awkward; and there is no time to cook anything else.

I therefore break it to Pincher, that when he sees the veal he sees his dinner; at which he says, with some confusion, that when he said he did not care for roast veal, he meant because it was generally served up underdone.

On this I smile a smile of triumph, and cut a slice.It is rather pinkish inside, but that will do for the Girls and me.

By the way, it is rather odd, but I never before observed a tendency on the part of Pincher to tell tedious tales. He has been at it all dinner-time, and he is at it now. In consequence of an accident to the jam roley-poley, one of the Girls is detained a good while downstairs, and another Girl goes after her to see what is the matter, and then, as neither return, the third Girl goes; and then Pincher, who has in turn fixed each with his eye as he has gone on with one of his confoundedly long-winded narratives, wheels sharply round and fixes me, and goes on still.

And at this moment I hear the twins upstairs begin to howl with all their might and main.

I can't stand this. I cut Pincher short, and go to see to the twins myself.



The Major : his agony.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF SOME CHARMING GIRLS.

IT is extraordinary how many times I have been compelled to point out to the Girls—kindly yet firmly—that I, Major Penny, might as well be consulted upon questions of moment relating to the domestic economy of the home circle.

It is extraordinary how often I have had to mention this fact, and it is even more extraordinary what a little notice has been taken of the fact when mentioned.

Take the case of Tootsy. Was I, or was I not, consulted relative to the engagement of Tootsy? No. Has that engagement, or has not that engagement, proved a failure? and have not unseemly brawls resulted therefrom?

Certainly.

Very well, then.

“Very well, then, Major,” (I am usually thus addressed by the Girls), “why don’t you go and try and find a new nurse yourself, and see how you like it?”

As may have been noticed, I am a man of few words, and on this occasion I use none. I rise from the breakfast-table, on the contrary, with a quiet smile, and go in search of my shoes in the passage.

As we are quite out of servants just now, I find that my shoes want cleaning, but I am too proud-spirited to mention it; so I do what I can in the privacy of

my study with the lower part of one of the window-curtains, and put the shoes on afterwards with the aid of a paper-knife and pocket-handkerchief, in consequence of the shoe-horn not being forthcoming, and my being still too proud-spirited to ask whether anybody has seen it.

Having put my shoes on, I put on my hat and gloves, and, with the same quiet smile, descend the steps, cross the garden, and go forth on to the high road.

I feel certain that the Girls are dying to know where I am going to, and are peeping at me from places of concealment; but I take no notice of them, and pursue my way.

The corner of the road turned, it occurs to me that I am not quite certain which way mine is, and what I mean to do. But this is not a moment for hesitation. I have, as it were, tacitly pledged myself to find a new nurse, and a new nurse I must find, or my position as head of our family circle is in jeopardy. Also, that nurse must be an improvement on Tootsy, or I am nowhere.

As may possibly have been gleaned from remarks already made, there is a certain straggleness about our neighbourhood that necessitates a considerable amount of pedestrian exercise if one would commune with one's kind.

There are long straight roads going up the sides of steep hills, and other long straight roads on the other side going down the hills, with about one house on either side.

There is the parish church all by itself, with the

parson's house and the clerk's cottage quite half a mile away from it, but yet so much nearer to it than anybody else's house, it is not to be wondered at much if the two officials have occasionally had the church all to themselves when the weather has been bad.

Added to the isolation of our dwelling-places is a strict exclusiveness, which causes nobody to be on visiting terms with any one else, and courtships among



Rosabel's Sisters.

neighbouring gentility are never heard of. The Girls have noticed this particularly.

Among the native lower orders there is, of course, some difference. They do not, as well as I can understand, marry with precipitation, but they have enormous families when married. Why should not a member of one of these families take charge of the twins?

In the distance I observe a cottage which I know to

be densely populated, and I approach and inquire. No ; there 's nursing enough to be done at home without going to look for it. I try another tightly-packed cottage with the same result, and walk away into space up a deuce of a hill.

I am awfully tired, but am too proud-spirited to give in. A third cottage meets my view, or rather, a small villa residence, semi-detached, and I determine



“Yes, ma!”

to ask an amiable middle-aged lady sitting in the front garden whether she knows of any unemployed nurse in the neighbourhood.

The middle-aged lady is as amiable as she looks. She says, “Bless me! where are my girls, I wonder?” Then calls “Beatrix! Maud! Aurora!”

To this three musical young voices respond, “Yes, ma! What is it?”

"My loves," says the elderly lady, "come here, I beg of you."

And then there is a gentle rustle of skirts and a pattering of brass-tipped heels, and three graceful young creatures appear upon the steps, and listen to the elderly lady's version of my request.



Rosabel.

"Oh, ma!" exclaims one of them, "it is the very thing for Rosabel."

And then all three cry "Rosabel!" in chorus, and Rosabel, who is, to my thinking, the nicest of the four, comes tripping out, and entwines herself with her sisters, who are already entwined beneath the honeysuckle over the doorway.

"And is this Rosabel?" I murmur, as I beckon to her to approach and pat her on the head, "and would she be equal to twins?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure she would," cry Beatrix, Maud,

and Aurora, in musical chorus; "wouldn't you, Rosabel, dearest?"

This is very nice. This is really very nice indeed!

I wonder what the Girls at home will say now?

"And the other—young ladies," I say with hesitation (I can hardly speak of them otherwise than as young ladies), "what do they do?"

"Beatrix wishes to go out as parlourmaid," says the elderly lady, "Maud as housemaid, and Aurora as cook."

If I were to engage all of them!

Stop a bit, though! What will the Girls at home say if I do?

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR HAS DOUBTS.

IN a general way, I am not in the habit of consulting the Girls, except, perhaps, at meal-times, when asking them whether they will take another help.

Hitherto, as Comptroller of our Home Circle, I have reason to believe I have performed the duties devolving on me to the satisfaction of all concerned, with, possibly, the exception of the Butcher and Baker, the Grocers, Green and Family, the Milkman and the Washerwoman, whose accounts, I am proud to say, I am in the habit of auditing with a scrupulous attention to details.

Upon those occasions when I have thought it neces-

sary to make any alteration in our domestic arrangements—for instance, to buy new carpets, or have the ceilings whitewashed—I have found it as well to mention, casually, what was my intention, but that was all. In the case of Tootsy, my directions had simply been, “Find a suitable person;” and it was, perhaps, unreasonable on my part, as we were pressed for time, to expect the Girls to trot out samples of the Tootsy tribe for me to select from, the more so as probably the one sample they got was the only one gettable.

Very well, then! In this instance it is I who have gone forth in search of a nurse, and my success has been triumphant.

I have got a nurse, and more than that, I have got a cook. Not the ordinary nurse and cook usually found in the dwellings of the respectable middle classes, but two born ladies, willing to engage themselves in my service as Lady Helps!

Could anything more satisfactory possibly have happened? And yet it is a most extraordinary thing—I have some doubts whether the Girls at home will altogether approve of Rosabel and Aurora.

We are, by the way, not to call them by those sweet names—at least, not yet awhile—until we are on a more friendly footing. Their name is Montgomery, and when we want anything, we must either put it somehow this way, “I beg your pardon, Miss Aurora Montgomery, but, labouring under the impression that you have inadvertently overlooked the replenishment of the mustard-pot, I should deem it a favour were you to mix a little in an egg-cup, and

bring it up as soon as convenient,"—or go down and mix the mustard yourself.

The question is, will the Girls fall into this new style, which, it must be allowed, when compared to talks with the late Dawkins, necessitates the employment of a syllable or two extra ?

Yet, why should they object ? Confound it all ! I really cannot see why on earth they should object ; and, what's more——

There they all are at the door.

Ahem !

You may have noticed, perhaps, that, as a rule, you feel more resolute when you press your hat down firmly, and keep your elbows close into your sides, at the same time straightening your knees and throwing the greater part of your weight on to the heel. It is also a good plan to hum a martial air, if one comes handy.

There is deep solicitude depicted on the visages of the Girls, and they say "Well ?" in chorus as I approach.

I am not exactly clear why I say so, but I *do* say, "Well, what ?"

"About the nurse," cry the Girls, still in chorus.

"Oh," I respond carelessly, as I hang my hat up, "that's all right, and—a new cook, too."

Now I come to think of it, is it all right, though ? It really was a maid-of-all-work we wanted, not a cook only. Certainly, there are Beatrix and Maud, who desire places as housemaid and parlourmaid, but should I be justified in increasing our establishment at this rate, and what would the Girls——

I can't understand the Girls. They seem so awfully delighted I have been successful.

"A nice quiet motherly person, this nurse is, I am sure?" says Cassandra.

"One who has had a large family of her own, and thoroughly understands what's wanted by a family—when young?" says Bathsheba.

Good gracious! If Rosabel only heard that!

"And the cook," cries Ursula, "she is sober, of course?"

Rather more good graciouser! If Aurora did happen to be listening at the keyhole!

This is an evening in which strategy has to be mingled with what I might almost feel inclined to denominate confounded whackers; and when, after I have read prayers, the hour of retiring to rest approaches, I take up my flat candlestick oppressed by the consciousness of a truth which will take a goodish bit of breaking presently.

* * * * *

Next morning, returning from a constitutional, I find the Girls once more assembled on the door-step. This time, evidently, events of a surprising nature have occurred.

Ursula trips down to the garden gate and breaks it to me.

"Oh, Major, what a while you have been, and two ladies have been waiting for you in the drawing-room almost ever since you have been gone!"

This somehow comes rather suddenly on me, for I feel certain I know who the two ladies are. Certainly, before this, I ought to have been prepared with an ex-

planation; and so, indeed, I have been, only I forget it again just at this moment. However, here goes!

As I thought, Aurora and Rosabel! And now to introduce them to the Girls. Aurora and Rosabel have risen from their seats, graceful, dignified, calm. Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula regard them with an expression which is not absolutely enthusiastic.

It is for me to speak.

Now for it!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH THE YOUNG LADIES CARRY ALL BEFORE THEM.

I HAVE done it.

It is over.

When I get a little bit cooler, I will endeavour to call to mind the exact particulars, but at present I hardly feel equal to a mental effort on so large a scale.

Yet it is positively preposterous that I (Major Penny—I fancy I have mentioned my name once before) should find myself wanting in words—nay, absolutely almost tongue-tied—respecting trifles wholly unworthy of serious consideration. Nevertheless, I am not sorry it is all over, and that the Girls clearly understand that Rosabel and Aurora are our new nurse and cook. I confess I do not quite understand what the Girls' private sentiments are upon the subject, in



The Old Girls and the New Girls.

consequence of their having hitherto maintained a silence which can only be described as ice-bound.

I, on the other hand, having recovered myself a little, am, if possible, verging on the other extreme, and am excessively voluble.

I casually remark, "You will find, I fear, Miss Aurora Montgomery, that the culinary arrangements



Another addition.

in the lower story are wanting in completeness, as the last cook—I mean the person who officiated below—had a habit of burning the bottoms out of things. Cassandra, however, will show you everything. Or," I add, observing that in Cassandra's expression there is no indication of a probability of her doing anything of the kind, "I will."

* * * * *

It is very strange how the breeding of the True

Lady manifests itself in trifling details. Nothing could be more urbane than the deportment of the Misses Montgomery, and they even carry their high-bred dissimulation of unconsciousness with respect to what I might almost denominate as the defiant snottiness of the Girls to the extent that they seem to be patronizing the Girls, and the Girls don't seem to like it.

However, we shall see what we shall see!

* * * * *

We have! I never remember to have sat down to a more perfectly served dinner. It is true that the *pièce de résistance* happens to be the cold roast beef left over from yesterday, with *entrées* of mashed potatoes and mixed pickles, but it is the style in which the things are placed upon the table that I look at.

Bathsheba's mood is still unpropitious. She says, "I like my potatoes cooked with salt."

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH SOMETHING IS KNOCKED DOWN TO THE MAJOR.

IT IS occasionally a pleasant change to stroll at evening up the high road. As a rule there is but little excitement; but this evening there is a sale at the

Auctioneer's, and I drop in and look round. I have no intention of buying anything. I have frequently dropped in before with the same intention, or rather want of intention, but I have found it to be an agreeable way of wiling away a spare half-hour.

At the auction-room there is generally a gathering of the neighbouring gentry, who drop in to look at the effects of those among their neighbours who are being sold up, and derive a kind of melancholy pleasure from



"Going!"

the contemplation of other people's household gods going off dirt cheap.

The population of these parts not being numerous, these sales do not occur often enough to grow common, and the excitement they offer is ever welcome. This evening the room is more than usually well attended, and I enter and nod smilingly to the right and to the left, and neighbours on the right and left nod back at me.

The furniture being sold this evening belonged to a purse-proud *parvenu*, who came and settled down here the winter before last, and was extremely supercilious

in his tone towards the neighbouring gentry. Things, however, went wrong with the purse-proud *parvenu's* business in the City, and we have now the satisfaction of seeing him sold up. A Butcher and a Grocer whom he let in rather stiffly watch the prices things fetch with a certain amount of eagerness.

I am really glad I did not miss the sale this evening. I have reason to believe that my presence is looked forward to at any assembly of a public character in the neighbourhood ; and though I am not quite sure



Another good Perambulator gone wrong.

that the Auctioneer is always quite as respectful as he ought to be, I observe with satisfaction that to-night he is smiling at me blandly.

I will nod to him.

I have.

* * * * *

This is really a very interesting sale. The purse-proud *parvenu's* goods are, as everybody always

thought, of the most gimcrack character, and as each lot falls under the hammer at some paltry price, everybody but the Butcher and Grocer smile pleasantly. The Butcher and Grocer are beginning to have doubts whether there will be much left for them when the bill of sale is settled.

But time goes, and so must I. One of the Auctioneer's men stops me.

He says, "Will you clear the perambulator to-night, sir?"



Insubordination in the ranks.

I inquire in amazement, "What perambulator?"

"The one that was knocked down to you! Twelve and six."

A light dawns on me. This comes of nodding to the Auctioneer. Shall I indignantly repudiate the perambulator? My first impulse is to do so; but then everybody is looking at me, and I fancy I hear a distinct snigger.

Besides, now I come to think of it, the twins really

ought to have a perambulator. It is most unreasonable to expect that Miss Rosabel Montgomery can drag about two hulking boys of that kind without mechanical aid.

Besides, also, it is only twelve and sixpence, and I don't see how I can get out of paying with any dignity.

* * * * *

I have paid now. The perambulator is mine, and I have chartered a boy to wheel it home for me.



Awkwardness.

The boy turns out to be a fool of a boy, with no command over his limbs. He wheels the perambulator in front of him, and somehow the wheel sticks fast, and he and the perambulator come to grief.

I am not aware whether the reader of this history ever fell over a perambulator, but, if not, it may be casually mentioned that it is a deuce of a thing to get clear away from when you once begin falling.

I have got this boy out of the tangle, and have slapped his head, and now he refuses to wheel the perambulator any more.

After all, the road is a lonely one, and very dark. Why should I not wheel it myself? Good gracious!

Two elegant young ladies approach.

I do not know them. Yes, I do! They are the other two Misses Montgomery—Miss Beatrix and Miss Maud. How confoundedly awkward!

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH NOTHING COULD BE NICER THAN IT IS.

I AM not without certain secret misgivings with regard to the policy of going in heavily for Lady Helps. I should be inclined to advise, if you want my opinion upon the subject, that one is enough to try at a time where there are many unmarried girls in the house, particularly if the girls are of mature age.

I have no doubt that the experience of married men may prove happier, and I should imagine that a young Lady Help would be just what a middle-aged married lady would like to introduce into her establishment; but, in the case of a household where there are unmarried girls of a mature age, it is calculated to lead to unkindly feelings, and possibly even come to *slaps*.

At the same time it must be allowed that nothing could be more considerate than the behaviour of Rosabel and Aurora towards the Girls.

The truth is, the Girls have not been brought up to domestic duties. Bathsheba at an early age went in for old china, whilst Cassandra took to water-colours, and Ursula to the four-finger exercise. In each branch of study one or other of the Girls excels, and in Berlin woolwork, in all its branches, I am ready to maintain that the Girls have no equals.

There has, up to now, been no occasion for the Girls to perform duties of a menial character. I am not a man of large means, but I have a little independency which entitles me to cultivate the refinements of life; and I would prefer that my sisters—the Girls—should continue to collect china (in moderation), to paint views (of adjacent scenery) in water-colours, and to practise the four-finger exercise (within limits).

I must confess I am surprised the Girls have not entered with more enthusiasm into this practical test of the question of Lady Helps, which theoretically has, to my certain knowledge, met with much approval at my own dinner-table.

I trust I have made myself sufficiently understood to have avoided a possible misconstruction respecting the Girls' behaviour towards Rosabel and Aurora. The Girls have made no open resistance. They would not venture to do so when I have once expressed a wish; but there is a want of responsiveness which, I fear, must tend to make Rosabel and Aurora feel uncomfortable.

For my own part, I am doing all I can to cause a

contrary impression. My first step has been to see that the dormitory allotted to them is equal to the occasion. The Girls appear to think that the spare bed-room we set apart for an occasional guest is not, perhaps, the one that should be used, and Cassandra says, "Won't Dawkins's room do for them?"

I have a look at the room that did for Dawkins, and rather wonder it didn't do for her in another sense. Although there is a superabundance of roof to Dawkins's room, which comes in contact with your head when you turn round if not in the habit of ducking to avoid it, there is a hole in the roof through which the rain is just now dripping.

The window is, in itself, not a bad sort of window, if it were placed so that the light could get in through it, and it ought to shut an inch or two tighter.

I suppose Dawkins must have been rather tired of a night, or I don't see how she could have slept in that bed; and I dare say she found it handier to lift her washstand jug without a handle, or she might possibly have mentioned it.

I suppose, too, lots of people don't care about having a soap-dish or a tooth-glass.

If the Misses Montgomery are to occupy the disgraceful cockloft vacated by Dawkins, we want the plumbers, glaziers, and painters here at once, and a cart-load of furniture to follow. Under these circumstances, I don't see how we can do better than allow the young Lady Helps to occupy the spare room for a night.

I have indicated their apartment to Miss Aurora, and she has gone into it with a graceful inclination.

Miss Rosabel is at this moment asking Bathsheba for a few large-sized Baden bath towels, and has just suggested that the position of the toilet-table shall be changed to one more desirable as regards reflection.

* * * * *
The morning meal is upon the table punctually to



Aurora on Mash.

the very moment we fixed upon overnight. I am ashamed to say I myself am not quite ready for it. I wonder whether the Girls are?

The Girls are not, thank goodness! and I am down first, and just able to pour out a cup of coffee, butter a bit of toast, and begin breaking the shell of an egg, before the first one descends.

“Really, Bathsheba,” I exclaim, “you must endeavour to be punctual. It gives no encouragement!”

Bathsheba's face wears an expression indicative of smouldering, as she silently helps herself to a piece of lukewarm bacon. Meanwhile I go on with my lukewarm egg, and don't think I care for an egg at that temperature when only slightly cooked.

If I saw my way clear, I think I should pocket this



Rosabel on Nursing.

egg surreptitiously, whilst Bathsheba was looking another way; but an underdone egg with a hole in it is such a messy thing to carry! Besides, there would be inquiries about the shell. Suppose I leave the egg uneaten? But I can't very well do that; it might hurt Aurora's feelings.



I have been for a stroll across the hill, and had a sandwich at an inn on the other side, and am now on my way back to lunch.

As I open the street door I hear a Babel of female voices. Everybody seems to be talking at once; but I have observed that this is the ordinary method of carrying on a conversation between women. Is it a



The Twins at it.

row? No. The Girls are actually pal-ing on (if I may use such a term) with Rosabel and Aurora.

At this moment but one voice is audible. It is Aurora's, and she is expatiating on the advantages accruing from the proper seasoning of minced beef, at which the Girls are expressing wonder and delight.

And now it is Rosabel, who is briefly running through the duties of a nurse, with the view to showing that a child need never cry if properly managed. How nice this is!—What's that?

The twins at this moment are howling their loudest upstairs. I mention the fact as I enter, and whilst Rosabel goes to look after them, Aurora places the hash upon the table.

* * * * *

"Now," cries Ursula, ecstatically—"now, Major, you must taste this!"

I do.

I have.

It tastes smoky.



Tasting the hash.

CHAPTER. XVII.

IN WHICH A BOLD SOLDIER COMES MARAUDING.

THIS is very nice!

Of course I knew from the first that the Girls would not keep on acting unreasonably, but I was inclined to think that their unreasonableness would have lasted longer. It was, I thought, possible that the Misses Montgomery had been rather too much of a shock to the Girls. Since then things have shaken down, and general joy prevails.

This is very nice!

Hallo!



A remarkably bold-looking soldier has just passed by the house, tapping his chin with the end of his cane, and ogling my upper story.

A detachment of the Onety-oneth were expected to be quartered shortly in Haggelbury, our nearest market town. I did not know they had come down yet, but such is evidently the case. Bathsheba and Ursula have entered into the matter with something like enthusiasm. They say it will make Haggelbury quite gay, but Cassandra is inclined to think that the advent of redcoats may tend towards carryings on, more especially in the case of the Haggelbury servant-girls. On this, Bathsheba very properly points out that the Haggelbury servant-girls are staid and proper.

servant-girls, and not at all like the servant-girls elsewhere, and that if the soldiers come there with an idea of carrying on, they will find that they have come to the wrong place.

Meanwhile what I want to know is, why that bold soldier ogled my upper story? Surely to goodness Bathsheba and Ursula would not encourage——

However, he is gone now, and I have an important letter I wish to send off this morning to the editor of the "Times," relative to a singularly simple, though curiously ingenious, Colorado beetle-trap which has just occurred to me; from which, when the Colorado beetle has once got in, it will be absolutely impossible to dislodge him without breaking the trap. It is most extraordinary that this idea has never occurred to anybody before, and certainly I must lose no time in putting it down on paper.

* * * * *

I have been much longer putting it down than I expected to be. Though the trap when made would be simplicity itself, I find that it has taken upwards of seven hundred words to explain it with anything approaching to lucidity; and even now I am not quite sure that I could understand it if it had been written by some one else, and were read to me for the first time.

Perhaps it will be best to defer sending to the "Times" to-day, and to take a walk over the hill and back just to clear my head, and then read the thing through quietly.

I am half-way up the hill when I observe an object upon its brow, standing out against the sky as though it were on the extreme limit of the earth in that

direction, and must either topple over or turn back. It turns back, however, and, as it approaches nearer, I discover it to be the same bold military man again.

But why the deuce is he coming this way? His way to Haggelbury is over the hill in the opposite direction. Has he lost it?

It may be unnecessary to point out to the reader, who has the advantage of Mr. Chasemore's somewhat flippant, though on the whole trustworthy, sketches to refer to, that my aspect when in repose is martial. I have recently, however, suffered somewhat severely from my feet, and have not that firmness of tread which accompanied my movements on the tented field. As the distance between this same bold soldier and me gradually lessens, I pull myself together as much as possible, and, holding my head erect, step forth.

I may be wrong, but I am under the impression that when this soldier's eye meets mine he will salute me. I shall then enter into conversation with him and ascertain particulars.

* * * * *

I was wrong; but it has been the result of unforeseen circumstances. I met his eye, but he did not salute me. At the moment I met it I kicked a loose stone with my big toe, and made a face. The bold soldier was pleased to grin at this accident or the face I made, and he has passed on without any conversation being entered into.

At this moment I hardly feel inclined for conversation. I am standing on one leg, nursing the injured toe in my hand, and I dare say I am making a series of faces.

Looking after the bold soldier, I meet his eye as he turns his head. He is still grinning.

* * * * *

My toe is better now. I have been over the hill, and am upon my way home again.

I have cleared my head, and intend to go thoroughly into the Colorado beetle-trap. It occurs to me that if the total destruction of the traps is an absolute necessity in every case of emptying, the expense of continually getting new traps may be urged as a drawback. I must endeavour to meet this objection, however, without loss of time.

Hallo!

* * * * *

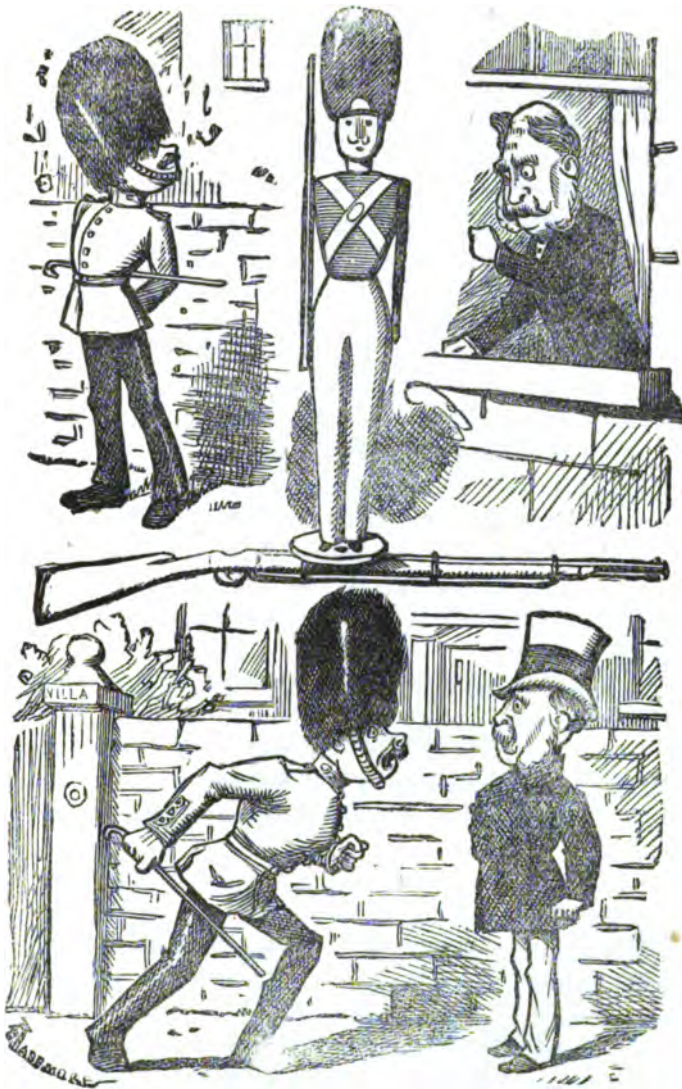
Accidentally looking through the parlour window on my way to my study, I observe the selfsame bold soldier, with his legs much straddled, standing directly in front of my house, and again ogling my upper story.

"Confound you, fellow! How dare you?"

He has not heard me, because the window is shut. But he ought to see me shaking my fist. Somehow, however, he doesn't; and now he has gone on again, and——. No, it can't be—yes, it is, though—*kissing his hand!*

Upon my soul, this is really too bad of Bathsheba and Ursula!

"I cannot for a moment conceive that they have done anything to warrant such a liberty on the part of the said bold soldier; but what I complain of is their imprudence in showing themselves at the windows at all; for I am aware, from experience, that the very smallest amount of encouragement is necessary.



The bold Soldier : his carryings on.

"Bathsheba! Ursula! are you upstairs?"

They are, and they descend in answer to my summons. I fix them with my eye. There is decidedly an unusual colour upon the faces of both, and most undoubtedly they quail beneath my glance.

Bathsheba, with an unwonted sprightliness, says, "Major, the Onety-oneth have arrived. There have been several pass by this morning."

This is nice news! Have the others kissed their hands too, I wonder? We shall have all the regiment down here at it to-morrow. Stay, though: is it possible the Girls have been carried away by the novelty of the occurrence, and have not recognized this fellow to be the same soldier passing and repassing?

"What very fine men they are!" exclaims Ursula.

Upon second thoughts, I will not at present say what I intended to say to the Girls, but will watch the course of events.

Lunch is ready now. How punctual Miss Aurora is! Irish stew, and yet how unlike any Irish stew I have ever tasted before! In fact, quite a pleasant change, with something of the flavour of *à la mode* beef! Henceforth our *cuisine* will not be wanting in variety.

* * * * *

There was something in that stew beyond the ordinary filling properties of stew, and I really now feel quite disinclined to go into the beetle-trap. I will, therefore, go for a walk instead.

I go across the fields at the back of my house, and compose my thoughts on my favourite stile till I feel rather sleepy, and then return. As I approach my

garden wall, the sound of a musical voice falls upon my ear. It belongs to Miss Rosabel. She is reciting the poem of "Baby Bunting." Hitherto I have failed to see much poetry in B. B. ; but now, how different!

If I thought she would not observe me, I should really very much like to take a peep over the wall. I will.

"Now, then, old What's-o'clock, none o' that!"

It is the bold soldier tugging at my coat-tails.

"Leave go, fellow!"

"Not me. You leave the young gal alone, will you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH A SELECT COMPANY ARE ENTERTAINED WITH TEA AND A LITTLE MUSIC.

THE bold soldier has gone about his business, and we are going on most satisfactorily.

I have not deemed it necessary to refer to the bold soldier in the presence of Miss Rosabel, or before the Girls.

A certain amount of disrespect manifested by the bold soldier may possibly be reported at the proper quarters, but, at present, the matter is under my consideration, and me alone it concerns.

The bold soldier, at any rate, has temporarily departed, and, unless he comes again, I am inclined to allow by-gones to be by-gones.

Meanwhile, I narrowly watch the conduct of the Misses Montgomery and the Girls, and I see nothing in the former to lead me to suppose that they, at any time, were conscious of the bold soldier's existence. In the latter, however, there is possibly less steadfastness of purpose, and I observe that the Girls look out of window a good deal, though, at present, I am unable to decide whether they always did do so, or that the habit has been but recently acquired.

* * * * *

In other respects, nothing could well be more satisfactory than the way we are getting on—on the new system.

We are now unanimously agreed that we never will return to the irksome bondage of the past. In the dark days of Dawkins, when Dawkins cooked for us, and washed and brushed up for us, it was positively dangerous to approach Dawkins with even a suggestion, and it must have been a bold individual indeed who would have ventured to lay a hand on Dawkins's housework. How different now!

In the morning the Girls assist Miss Aurora in preparing the breakfast, washing up the breakfast-things, and making the beds, and there is not one unkind word—one cross look.

Again, in the nursery, over and over again, one Girl will take one twin, and another the other, and bath and bottle him, whilst Miss Rosabel looks on with a pleasant smile.

In the dark days of Dawkins it was as much as your life was worth to ask for your shaving-water before Dawkins brought it, should you, in consequence of your watch being wrong, fancy Dawkins had forgotten it. Now you can go out upon the landing and call half a dozen times for it without giving offence.



The Major's consideration.

Again, would Dawkins ever have allowed you to carry your own coals upstairs? No. Whereas now I invariably do so, without the slightest approach to discussion upon the subject.

It may be here mentioned that this experiment of ours, of the employment of Lady Helps, has created a profound sensation among the neighbouring gentry, and, with the exception of Lady Taltorkington (who still labours under the impression that I am deranged), we have had visits from all the best families, and have been literally overwhelmed with inquiries.

If everything continues satisfactorily, it is possible that the ordinary servant-girl will entirely vanish from the domestic circles in these parts; and I have already begun to prepare a letter to the editor of the "Times," which, when it appears, will, I have reason to believe, cause a profound sensation.



More consideration on the part of the Major.

* * * * *

An idea has just occurred to Cassandra, and she trips into my study to communicate it.

"Major," she says, "I have just made a most delightful discovery. Dear Aurora is an accomplished musician. This evening the Robinson girls are coming, and Mr. Jackson and Mr. Johnson. Supposing, after tea, we have dear Aurora up to play to them?"

The idea appears to me to be an admirable one, and I readily acquiesce. The Robinson girls are well-meaning, and act according to their lights; but their

range of vision is limited and their experience small. They are, in fact, just exactly the kind of persons who would naturally be prejudiced against anything partaking of the nature of innovation, particularly when on a scale of such magnitude as the employment of the highly educated on the maid-of-all-work system. I shall look forward to this evening, and anticipate triumphant results.

* * * * *

The company having arrived, Rosabel, during a temporary lull among the twins, has opened the street door. The Robinson girls sail past her without taking any notice, but I observe that young Jackson, who accompanies them, opens his eyes very widely.

Old Johnson comes alone shortly afterwards, and is a long while hanging up his hat and overcoat. Aurora brings up the tea.

Hitherto we have made no remark. We have allowed the company to gaze, but have maintained silence. When, however, the tea-things are removed, I state the case, and I have reason to believe that the company are rather surprised.

The eldest Miss Robinson says, "Don't you find it rather awkward to decide how to treat this class of persons?"

"Not in the least," I respond; "we treat them as though they were our own family."

"Oh!" says the eldest Miss Robinson.

I fancied that would surprise her; and I continue with a quiet smile, "You may have observed the faultless way in which the tea was made and handed round. We will, with your permission, allow sufficient

time to elapse for the tea-things to be washed up, and then summon Miss Aurora—our cook and housemaid—to oblige us with a selection from the beauties of Beethoven on the pianoforte.”

“Bless me!” says old Johnson.

* * * * *

The time has come. The tea-things are washed up. We have had some of the beauties of Beethoven and other distinguished composers. We are now having a soprano song from the latest opera. Old Johnson is listening entranced, and young Jackson is hanging all over the piano.

The Robinson girls don't seem very rapturous. Prejudice again.

The other Girls are looking a little solemn.

Aurora shows signs of leaving off.

“Go on ; oh, pray go on !” says young Jackson.



The pleasant Evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG AGAIN.

IT must be confessed that I have my misgivings with regard to the experiment.

Undoubtedly the transfer of our young Lady Helps from the kitchen and nursery to the drawing-room has been, as far as old Johnson and young Jackson are concerned, an enormous success. I never knew old Johnson so lively. And as to young Jackson, it requires positive brute force to get him away from the piano to hand round the pound-cake and negus.

Where my misgiving comes in is with respect to the Robinson girls. Perhaps they really do not care for music. They somehow do not seem to be enjoying themselves.

With regard to Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula, I do not exactly know what to think. It was certainly Cassandra's own suggestion that we should have in "dear Aurora" to play to us; but I cannot help fancying now that there is an expression on her face indicative of mixed feelings, inclusive of a desire to slap or pinch "dear Aurora" hard.

Undoubtedly there is reason to believe that the experiment has not been wholly successful, but, thank goodness! the evening is at an end.

For some time past the company have been divided, as it were, and estranged.

At one end of the room have sat silently the three

Penny Girls and the Girls Robinson, and a deathlike silence has prevailed amongst them. At the other end of the room Aurora and Rosabel are playing a duet, and old Johnson and young Jackson are crawling around, so to speak, with a cloyed look on them, like flies in summer-time amongst the moist sugar in a grocer's window. The centre of the apartment, a kind of neutral ground, is occupied by myself, Major Penny, who for a certain length of time regard the proceedings with a benignant smile, and then less benignantly.

At the end of the duet, wild applause from young Jackson on the lid of the piano (Cassandra's piano on the hire system, and I can see she doesn't like it). Also chuckle-headedness, and "brayvo! brayvo! brayvissimo!" from old Johnson, whilst deathlike silence still prevails among the Girls.

Then Aurora and Rosabel begin another duet, and then suddenly the eldest Girl Robinson rises, and says, with emphasis, to the Penny Girls, "I am afraid it is growing very late. The time *does* pass so rapidly when one is *amusing* oneself; and I am sure *these gentlemen* are! Ann, Jane" (to the other Girls Robinson), "we had better put on our bonnets. *Do, pray, come!*"

* * * * *

They have put on their bonnets. They have thanked us, with more emphasis, for a *very* pleasant evening, and they are gone.

So is that doddling old dotard of a Johnson. So is that empty-headed ass, young Jackson. Aurora and Rosabel have retired to their respective spheres;

Cassandra is trying the notes of her piano on the hire system to ascertain which are broken; Bathsheba says she has a headache; and Ursula has gone to bed.

I am not quite sure whether we ought to have many more of these kind of evenings.

But if we do, we won't have old Johnson and young Jackson again. No, thank you!

* * * * *

And now to consider the experiment of an attractive young Lady Help from another point of view—with regard to the effect she is likely to have upon the local tradesmen's assistants, and the rank and file of the English army when quartered in the neighbourhood.

It has taken me some little time to thoroughly realize the fact; but, now it is realized, here it is. The soul of the young man from the Baker's is filled with ecstasy at the sight of Aurora. The young man from the Butcher's is a prey to conflicting emotions, amongst which are the deepest passion and the deadliest jealousy. If anything occurs to thwart that young man's aspirations (and I don't believe he has a chance), that young man wouldn't be safe to come near with a sticking-knife in his possession.

But perhaps the worst case of all is that of the young man from the Grocer's shop. I don't like to meet the eye of that young man. It is hollow, and has a hungry look in it. I should think, since Aurora began taking in our groceries, his services to his employer have been comparatively valueless.

A third of that young man's day appears to be taken up in leaving wrong packages at our house, and

coming again to fetch them, or to ask whether he has accidentally left other packages of an apocryphal character.

So far Aurora downstairs. Now as to Rosabel upstairs.

At this moment three bold soldiers are seated in front of some railings opposite my house, and are fixing and focussing Rosabel at the nursery window in a way which, taking the fact that I am shaking my fist at them like anything from the parlour window, is really perfectly incredible. How—I repeat the question—how dare they?

* * * * *

It takes my breath away.

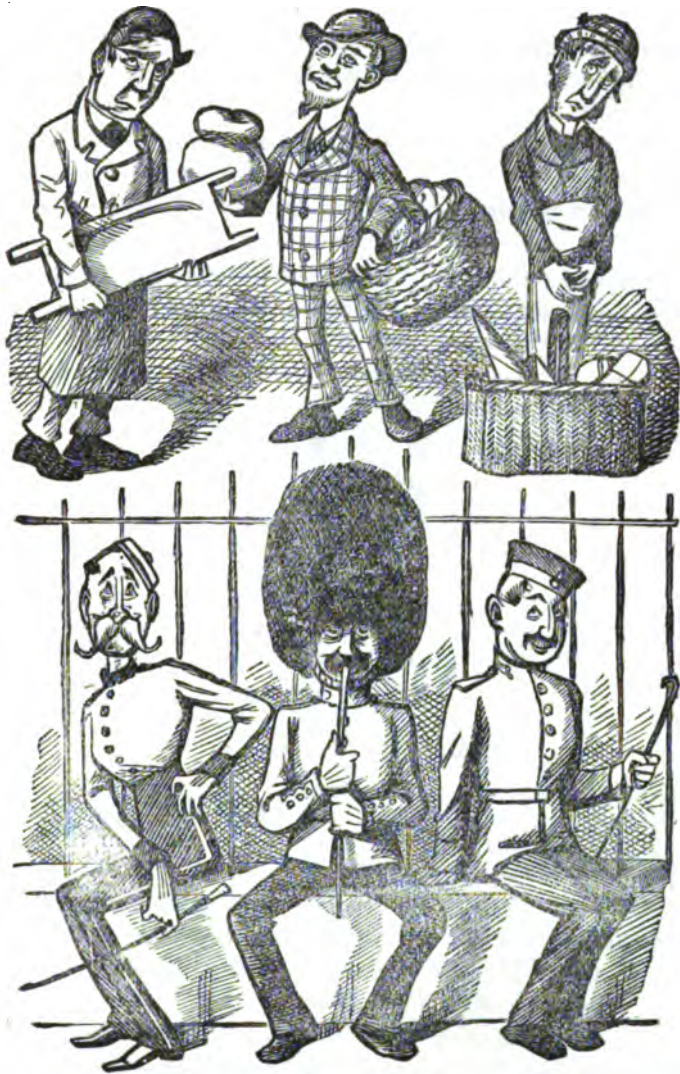
CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR THINKS THE TWINS OUGHT,
TO BE CALLED SOMETHING.

It has just occurred to me (I trust I may be allowed to refer to the occurrence *en passant*) that the title of this work being the Twopenny Twins, there ought to be a little bit more about the twins in this work.

There shall be more.

It must not, however, be supposed that though I have lately been somewhat silent regarding the twins,



Extraordinary effects of the Aurora-Rosabel experiment.

that the twins themselves maintain the same reticence. If they could be squallier then they have been, they are.

I take it that the voice of innocent babyhood at its higher notes is a thing one may get to like in course of time, but I should say it took a long while.

* * * * *

The time has now arrived when the twins should have names to go by. Hitherto a numeral has suf-



Consulting the Dictionary.

ficed, but I am of opinion that it would be more desirable to call them something, and the question that naturally arises is, What?

In matters of this kind I have found that a consultation with the Girls is apt to lead to discussion. At any rate, it will be best to make my own mind up first, and the only question is, How?

Ah! an idea strikes me. What is this? "Nugent's **New Pocket Dictionary of the French and English**

Languages." I remember there is a list of names somewhere at the end. Here it is:—

"Proper Names, Surnames. etc., etc., which Begin by a Different Letter in French."

No. 1 Name.—Abdias, Obadiah. How about Obadiah? That might save trouble, by the bye. The twins might be called the Two Obadiahs. Perhaps that wouldn't do, though, either. They would sound too much like a comic song.

Let me see again. Adelstan, Ethelstan. Ethelstan Twopenny sounds rather well.

Aggée, Haggée, Haggai. I don't care for those.

Alexandrette, Scanderoon. This is getting beyond me.

Allemagne, Germany. Angleterre, England. Oh, bother this!

Hallo! here's another list.

"Abbreviations of English and French Christian Names used in Familiar Discourse." Let's be familiar.

Assy, for Alice. That's rough on Alice's mental qualifications, it seems to me. Bat for Bartholomew. A Towpenny Bat wouldn't do. And what should the other be called? Ball, perhaps, or Stumps.

Bob for Robert, Dicky for Richard, Grit for Griffith, Jos for Joshua, Nobs for Obadiah. It's no good looking at this; it only distracts me. Let me think. There must be two names, of course, and there should be some connection between the two—such as Romulus and Remus. How about Romulus and Remus, by the bye? Stay, though, that wouldn't do! People would compare me to the wild beast that nursed them. Suppose I take a walk.

I have been walking some time, and nothing has yet occurred to me. Here is our Grocer's shop, with his name painted over it. His name is Jill. It suggests Jack and Jill. I always thought Jill was a girl's name. However, I won't call the twins Jack and Jill, and I have higher aims for them than fetching pails of water.

Bless me! who is that I see in the coffee-room of



Consulting Bagshaw.

the "White Lion"? My old friend Bagshaw, as I am alive—Bagshaw of ours! The very man to consult! A man who is always prompt and ready for action.

"How do, Bagshaw? How do, Captain? Glad to meet you."

Bagshaw doesn't seem so very glad, but that's his way. He is not a demonstrative man. He says he is

well, and also mentions that since I met him last he has been promoted. Hang it all! I wish I had known that; but I couldn't see his uniform through the window. However, I congratulate him warmly when I get inside the room, and then break it to him about the twins.

"I want your advice, old fellow," I say. "I want a name for a boy baby."

He stares hard for half a minute, and then says "Wellington," with decision, and evidently thinks the matter settled.

Wellington Twopenny! I fancy that sounds rather well; but then there's the other twin. I put this to him hastily, as he is striding from the room. I say, "But I want two names." He turns on his heels, and faces me.

"What do you want two for?"

I say, "It's usual in a case of twins. What do you say to Napoleon for the other?"

"Confounded tomfoolery, sir!" he says, and goes off in a rage. Bagshaw was always rather an ass, it seems to me, and so confoundedly touchy!

I put on my hat again, and go farther.

Here's our curate Mr. Smale's house. I'll just drop in and put it to him. I tell him I have twins to provide for, and am short of names. He says it is a serious matter. I break Romulus and Remus to him, and he rejects them instantly as Pagan. Perhaps something Scriptural would meet with his approval. There is Ham and Shem; but I fancy there ought to be a Japheth, properly. I don't like to suggest Cain and Abel, but I venture on David and Goliath, and

•

he springs from his chair and asks me if I mean to insult him.

Probably Goliath is not quite the right thing, and I explain that it was a slip of the tongue. But Smale gets quite warm about it, and won't be appeased. So I give him a bit of my mind, and take my departure.



Insulting the Clergy.

Bless me!—why did I not think of it before?—there is Lady Taltorkington, the person of all others to be consulted. I will call on her this afternoon.

* * * * *

It seems to me she has not, as yet, quite got over the impression that I am a lunatic. She fixes me pretty steadily with her eye whilst I get through my preliminary sentence. When I have got through it, and say blandly, "Now, my dear Lady Taltorkington, if you had twins, what would you call them?" she starts indignantly to her feet, and rings the bell for the servant to show me out.

* * * * *

The servant has done so. I have quitted Taltorkington Towers.

On reflection, it occurs to me that as Lady Taltorkington is a spinster who is notorious for her aversion to children, I was wrong in consulting her, and, possibly, I put the question rather the wrong way.

After all, it seems to me it is not I who, properly speaking, should have the responsibility of finding names for the twins. Oughtn't their Godfathers and Godmothers to do it?

Certainly.



Insulting the Gentry.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH THERE IS VERY NEARLY A TRAGEDY.

UNLESS I am labouring under a most extraordinary misapprehension, it distinctly states in your Catechism that your name is given to you by your Godfather and Godmother.

The question which naturally arises is, Whom shall I select for the office?

This wants thinking over.

Let me think.

Stop a bit, though; thought is at this moment out of the question—that is to say, thought on this subject.

The subject occupying the undivided attention of my household at this moment is Aurora's toothache.

When everything seemed going on—or, perhaps, I might say, on the point of going on—satisfactorily, Aurora's tooth began to ache.

It would be unreasonable and unfair to expect culinary feats from Aurora under these circumstances, and we neither expect them nor get them. At this moment Aurora is reclining, with her head tied up, upon the drawing-room sofa, and two of the Girls are endeavouring to soothe her sufferings, and persuade her to try infallible remedies, whilst the third Girl is making a kind of a stew, which we are to make a sort of meal of presently, when we have time.

Unfortunately the infallibles are on this occasion un-

availing. They won't cure Aurora, who still reclines, and her head is still tied up.

The Girls implore me to seek medical aid. Aurora's blue orbs, fixed upon me, are full of plaintive entreaty. I hastily swallow a mouthful of the dish and crumble up a bit of bread, and seize my hat.

It would be selfish to think of food at such a moment, though I must confess that I am desperately hungry.

As I seize my hat, therefore, I seize a chunk of bread off the bread-plate in the hall, and a moment afterwards am choking on the high road without.

When I say medical aid, I own that this is putting the kind of aid one usually gets from one of our local doctors in rather a flattering light. We have two local doctors, and one of them is pretty good when sober, whilst the other is rather bad, generally. The pretty-good-when-sober local doctor is away from home—probably getting unsober—so I am obliged to go to the other doctor, and put it to him about the tooth.

He says, "Why don't she have it out?"

I explain that she objects.

He says, "Bah!"

I explain that Aurora is not quite sure which tooth it is that is aching, as all the jaw aches. On which he grunts, but offers no remark.

I say, finding a longish pause here, "Is there any kind of remedy you can suggest?"

He makes no reply, but, rising to his feet (he has been seated hitherto), walks round the shop and reads the names on the bottles. As he does so, I follow his movements with my eye, and pass the time wondering whether he knows himself the meaning of the

names, and why peppermint lozenges should be called what the bottle calls them.

After a time he appears to light unexpectedly upon a small quantity of white powder, which he weighs with elaboration, upsetting about half of it on the counter and the floor.

I ask what it is ; but, as he is not in the habit of answering questions, he takes no notice, and I wait as patiently as I can.

Eventually, the packet being made, he looks for a pen in a couple of drawers, and, finding it at last under the counter, writes the word "Quinine" on it, and asks me for a shilling.

I return to find Aurora still reclining, and the Girls in great distress. The quinine is administered, and we await the results. They are almost immediate: Aurora is very sick.

I am much distressed. So are the Girls. Rosabel suggests that she should go home to their dear mamma, and fetch another infallible remedy mamma keeps always at hand ready prepared.

Aurora, however, elects to go herself. She thinks the change may do her good. We think so too.



Aurora has gone.

An interval of comparative calm is now ensuing. I have had some more of the dish. It doesn't taste very well cold ; but never mind.

I am preparing a letter to the editor of the "Times," which occupies me longer than I expected, and one of



Aurora's Mamma.

the Girls taps at the door, and asks me whether I know what time it is. I look up at the clock.

Bless me! I had no idea it was so late.

"Oh! Major," says Cassandra, "we are in such a dreadful state about poor dear Aurora! She promised she would return directly, and it is three hours since she went out."

I suggest that perhaps her mamma has detained her; but I, too, am certainly rather uneasy.

Another hour has passed, yet Aurora has not returned. I seek my apartment, and wile away a little time in experiments with a patent hair-wash, which I believe I neglected to mention having purchased at the chemist's with the quinine. Whilst thus occupied, another of the Girls comes tapping.

"Oh, Major, we are so horribly frightened! Do you really think that was quinine you bought?"

"Do I what?" This is worse than Tootsy's Epsom salts! But stay. Do not let us be precipitate. One false alarm of that kind is surely enough. I know the taste of quinine perfectly, and here is the paper with a little yet in it. In my excitement I forget the dye upon my fingers.

Merciful goodness! It is not the least bit like quinine. What is to be done? I stagger towards the street door, and my knees knock together as I go. But suddenly the street door opens, and Aurora enters, fresh and beautiful as ever.

My feelings are too much for me. I fling away my hat. I catch Aurora to my bosom, and gazing upwards with a vision dimmed with tears of joy, find that Aurora's mamma has accompanied her child, and

that she seems to be wondering what the deuce I am doing!

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR GOES FOR A GODFATHER.

AN accident has recalled the fact to my mind that my fag at old Merchant Taylors' is still alive, and appears to be getting on pretty middling.

The fellow's name, by a curious chance, was Penniwate, and in the old Merchant Taylors' days it was my habit to make merry over the fact that Penniwate waited on Penny!

I have frequently laughed at this jest (my own) myself. P.W. did not laugh much, if I remember. He was a heavy kind of boy, and fat. He made a good warming-pan on sharp frosty nights.

To-day, glancing through the "Times" (it is odd my letter suggesting a site for the Needle is not in to-day, but doubtless it will appear to-morrow—I presume there is occasionally a press of correspondence), I observe a person of the name of Penniwate subscribing a largish sum to a charity.

Ebenezer Penniwate! That *must* be my old fag. And here is his business address, Bleeding Hart Yard. The very place for a charitably disposed person to

live in. Naturally, under the circumstances, his heart would bleed for the sufferings of his fellow-creatures.

Why should it not bleed for the twins? It shall!

This is really a remarkably happy thought of mine! Penniwate will feel honoured by my calling on him. Hang me! I shouldn't wonder if the fellow feels a little frightened, to begin with, when he first hears my name. I rather fancy I should in his place.

Lord, how I used to give it to that fellow! I think I recollect how knotted towels and buckle-ends of straps were liberally applied to a tightened surface. I toasted him, too, if I remember rightly, inside the high fire-screen; and at another time stood him, in his night-shirt, in the snow to sing "Hot Codlins," and he did the sneezing so awfully lifelike, we encored him.

Decidedly he should be Godfather to these two poor boys! He will be glad of the chance, proud of the honour. I'll go and see him at once.

I walk to the station, I take a third return upon principle, because the Company have suppressed the second class in the hope of forcing me to ride first. I will *not* ride first, as I mentioned before, on principle. The third has a confoundedly hard seat, and the people who ride with me are confoundedly objectionable; but I have my principle, and to my principle I stick.

One of our local gentry passes by whilst I am looking out of the carriage window, and I nod to him. He rather jumps when he sees where I am, but I smile blandly, and I say,

"You are surprised that I should ride third?"

He says, "Yes, I am."

I say, "I do it on principle."

He says, "But the other's only threepence-halfpenny more on the double journey."

I smile. "Yes, but I do it on principle."

He says, "You must be a stupid fool to make yourself jolly uncomfortable to save threepence-halfpenny."

"Confound you, sir!" I say. "Don't you understand——"

But he has gone, and I have to content myself with explaining the facts of the case to an old woman with a bundle on the opposite seat. She says,

"Quite right too, sir. If you can't afford it, why should you? Third's good enough for the likes of me and you, sure—ly."



You my possibly never have visited Bleeding Hart Yard. Had Penniwate not lived there, I am not quite sure that I should have visited it myself.

They say that it is going to be pulled down. Possibly Penniwate's premises may tumble down of their own accord before then. They at present appear to be in a tottering condition, and only want a strong gale of wind, or a good shove, to topple them over into the road.

Poor Penniwate is, after all, perhaps, not getting on quite as well as I had at first supposed.

I have heard of such things as people, even when on the eve of bankruptcy, subscribing to popular charities, by way of advertisement, to make other people think

they are all right. Possibly I have done wrong in selecting Penniwate as a Godfather.

The house is dreadfully dirty, and the passage blocked up by empty boxes and other lumber. Evidently Penniwate's business is on its last legs, or worse than that even—on crutches. I enter a dimly-lighted office, which smells damp and mouldy, and ask for my ancient fag. "Is he in?"

"I'll go and see, sir," says a weak-eyed young man, who comes and blinks at me furtively.

I can understand Penniwate's position. Afraid of duns. Don't know whether he is at home or not.

"Shall I take up your name, sir?"

"Tell him Major Penny desires to see him."

"Penny what, sir?"

"Penny nothing. Major Penny!"

"Oh, I beg pardon, sir; I thought it sounded as if there was something short."

What does he mean by that? I am half inclined to think he means impertinence, but I won't go into it. To be sure, Penny weight—Short weight. I'll speak to P.W. about this when I see him.



The boy is a deuce of a long while gone. A profound silence prevails in the place of business. Not a soul comes in to buy anything.

Deadly-lively job this of P.W.'s, it strikes me.

I have been waiting over half an hour. I hammer on the counter. A grey-headed man comes to speak to me. He wants to know what I want. I tell him.

He says he knows nothing of it, but he supposes the boy passed my name up the pipe.

Is it dignified for a Major, who has led forces on the ensanguined field of battle, to have his name and title passed up a pipe? This is a nice point. I might almost write to the editor of the "Times" to ask his opinion on the subject.



Waiting.



CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH THE MAJOR LANDS A GODFATHER.

THE grey-headed man proposes passing my name up the pipe again to make sure. Confound him and

his pipe! But I suppose he means no offence, so I mention my name to him.

He says, "What?"

I say, "Major Penny."

He says, "Penniwate, I suppose?"

I say, "Certainly not. Penny."

He repeats, "Not Penny. No; I said Penniwate. Connection of the gov'nor, I suppose?"

"No, sir," I reply, naturally indignant, "no connection. Don't want to be. My name is simply Penny. P—E—N—N—Y. Will you please say I have waited a long while?"

The grey-headed man retires to a corner, and I hear a faint whisper to this effect: "Here's Penny, and he says he won't wait."

Then I hear a voice in the pipe using bad language, and asking, "Who's playing the fool?"

Explanations ensue between the man this end and Penniwate himself at the other, and, at last, word comes down that I am to go upstairs.

I do so; but I somehow don't feel quite so much in the humour for the interview as I did at first. I have indeed half a mind to throw the whole thing up, and go home.

However, I go upstairs. I knock at a door indicated.

"Come in!" cries a voice inside. There is nothing at all encouraging—or, indeed, I may say, respectful—about the tone of the voice; but I think it, perhaps, best to go in, as I have come on purpose.

There is, however, a difficulty about opening the door, for the handle of which I search upon the wrong

side, to begin with. Whilst still searching, I hear bad language within the room.

Even now I have a good mind to give up the godfather notion, and go away. However, I don't do that; I go on looking for the door-handle.

"Bother you!" says the voice. But it is more than bother, if the truth must be told. "Why don't you come in?"

I am almost in pitch darkness out here, and am still groping wildly for the door-handle. It would seem so absurd to give it up and go away, but I don't see anything else for it, unless the person inside chooses to offer some assistance. He has—just when I was leaning against the door, too—and I go in with a run, my hat going in advance.

"The handle's off the outside," he says. "Couldn't you find that out, without such a jolly lot of fumbling?" (only he doesn't exactly say jolly).

I ignore the expletives, and say, "I desire to speak to Mr. Penniwate."

"Well, speak, can't you?" says the person confronting me; "you've been long enough about it."

I look at him—I look at him very hard. Is it possible that this is my Penniwate? He used to be my junior—several years my junior, but he appears to have grown so old. He positively has not a hair on his head.

"You—you are the same that was at Merchant Taylors', aren't you?" I ask—"at school, I mean, thirty years ago?"

He pauses for a moment to think. "Yes," he replies, slowly, "I was at school there. What of it?"

The bills were paid, I believe. Nobody owes anything on my account that I know of; and if they do, you ought to have sent in your claim sooner."

I can scarcely forbear from a smile. "Don't you know me?" (I pause here to think whether he had a nickname. To be sure he had. We gave him one after that "Hot Codlins" business.) "Don't you know me, Eben-sneezer?"

The truth appears to dawn upon him gradually.

"You're old Penny!" he cries.

Hang "*old* Penny!" But stay, old is a kind of term of endearment among boys. "To be sure I am," I say.

There is a short pause.

"What a beast I used to think you!" he says, in a creamy tone. "You've got to be very podgy."

Hang "podgy!" I don't like this at all. "You've got awfully thin on top," I retort. "Indeed, thin is hardly the word."

There is another pause.

"Why did you come here?" he asks.

"I'll tell you," I reply. "You're a bachelor—don't speak!—I know you are by the look of you. I—I am the uncle of two boys; in point of fact, twin boys. I want a Godfather for them. I saw your name in the paper this morning. I recognized it. A flood of pleasant memories rushed through my mind. I said, 'I will go and see him this very day.' I did. Here I am!"

One more of those pauses.

"You want me to be the twins' Godfather?" he says.

"That is just what I do want."

"What are the duties of a Godfather?" he asks, in

the same dreamy tone he used before, and I noticed his eyes wander towards an open cheque-book on the table.

Awfully happy thought! Duties? Duties in three figures. But it will be best not to startle him too much at first.



The Appeal.

“Really and truly,” I say, “beyond the mugs—or shall we say spoons and forks, or mugs and spoons and forks?—I don’t think there are any duties particularly insisted on.”

“Oh!” he says, “all right; I’ll be their Godfather. Good day to you!”



The last part of our interview was a trifle abrupt, it seemed to me, but two or three people seemed to be shouting up the pipe as I tried to explain to him where

I lived, and what train he ought to catch to be in time for the christening.

The day has arrived. I have written in the meanwhile to P.W., so that there could be no mistake. He ought to be here by eleven sharp, and then we shall have plenty of time.



The Outrage.

We have offered him a bed. He might as well sleep here. It will be rather a nuisance, perhaps; but then, as he is to be Godfather, and with that cheque-book—I believe, too, he really is *not* so very badly off.

Eleven thirty-five. No signs of him. Twelve. Still no signs, and the ceremony is fixed for half-past twelve!

Twelve fifteen. A parcel come by rail. What on earth is this?

My blood boils. I can hardly trust myself to speak, but I must.

Here is a note. He sends two mugs, and two forks, and two spoons, but he doesn't feel equal to the rest of the duties.

Well! do you say? There are, anyhow, two mugs, two forks, and two spoons to the good. Is that what you were pleased to remark? Look here! The mugs are earthenware—the forks and spoons of wood!!



CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH THERE IS VERY NEARLY A MISTAKE IN THE CEREMONY.

I HAVE settled on the names.

As I intend that the twins themselves shall devote their lives to the upholding of the honour and glory of Old England—one in the army and the other in the navy—I have decided on calling the first twin Alexander, and the second Horatio.

In consequence of Rosabel and Aurora's mamma having kindly offered to act as Godmother to Alexander, in deference to a wish she has expressed it is my intention to add Montgomery as a second name; whilst, with respect to Horatio, the fact that my old friend Captain Pincher has promised to do the needful in his case (inclusive of a mug of elegant

design), we shall be compelled to couple Horatio with Pincher. It seems a pity, but it can't very well be helped; and, somehow, Pincher doesn't seem to be aware what a beast of a name he has got.

Several times I have been on the point of breaking it gently to Pincher that it won't do, but consideration for Pincher's feelings has caused me to refrain. Besides, as though Pincher's male parent had not done him deadly wrong enough by giving him such a surname, he has added insult to injury by calling him Aminadab. If I reject one, I must take the other, or quarrel with Pincher for life.

Taking a stroll up the high road the evening before the ceremony, I meet Pincher coming at a deuce of a pace round a corner, and panting for breath.

"Hallo! Captain," I say, "what's the matter?"

Pincher takes off his hat, and dabs at his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. "Matter!" he gasps; "everything's the matter. It's not come! What the deuce is to be done?"

"The—the mug?" I say, suddenly interested.

"Yes. I've telegraphed for it, and I'm on my way down to the station again to make further inquiry."

"That's right," I say, with much earnestness; "stick to them. Put up with none of their nonsense!"

Pincher dabs at his forehead once more, crushes down his hat, and scuds away up the hill as fast as his poor old legs will carry him.

It is really an awfully funny sight, is Pincher's back view, under these circumstances. I confess I cannot refrain from a smile. Indeed, I sit down on a low wall and roar.



The Christening.

Then the thought occurs to me, "Supposing, after all, the mug is really lost? I don't see much fun in that."

* * * * *

Evidently the twins are impressed with the importance of the ceremony in store for them.

They have scarcely slept a wink all night. No more has anybody else; but that, apparently, does not signify to the twins.

Mrs. Montgomery has seen them early this morning, and says that they are feverish, and must be kept very warm. Unfortunately, it is an awfully bleak day, with an east wind like a knife. I wonder whether it is customary to have the chill taken off the water in the font under such circumstances? I'll ask the clerk.

By the time we ought to start, neither Pincher nor his mug have put in an appearance. Perhaps, however, he intends to meet us at the church. The ladies are all ready and waiting. We have glasses of wine and biscuits, and set forth.

Mrs. Montgomery heads the procession.

Next in order follow Rosabel and Aurora, each carrying a twin.

Then come Maud and Beatrix (sisters of Rosabel and Aurora), who say "Ketchetty!" to the twins over Rosabel and Aurora's shoulders.

After them come Bathsheba, Cassandra, and Ursula, and—

I, Major Penny, bring up the rear!

A mongrel dog, of an irreverent nature, runs behind and barks. I call to it to "Get out," but it won't;

and I ultimately decide upon ignoring its presence, and the procession continues.

At the turn of the road we find an imbecile native of these parts seated on a gate.

When he sees us he appears to be amused. He says, "Lookee at 'un droivin' t' goslin's to t' market!" and as I take no notice of him, continues to indulge in similar ribaldries as long as we are in sight.

As we approach the church, I lead the procession with Mrs. Montgomery, so as to be able to make a few preliminary arrangements of a necessary character.

An ancient female, apparently very short-sighted, meets us in the porch and drops a curtsy.

"It's your turn next, deary," she says, with a smile of great affability; "and after you a christening."

The ancient female seems to mean some kind of joke by this—only I don't quite see it.

"We are the christening," I observe, "unless there are two."

"Two!" repeats the ancient female, who, by the way, seems to be rather hard of hearing as well as dim of sight. "Yes, deary, they're twins, but it's quite exceptional."

"Confound you!" I exclaim, "don't you know we want to be the christen—I mean—confound you!—we're the christening—"

"All right, deary, there's no occasion to call so loud. You're most old enough to have got a name, sir, I should think. But I understand your fun: the lady wants to change hers. So you shall, deary. It's your turn next."

This old woman is intolerable. What is to be done

with her? She appears to have told somebody, who has told somebody else, that we are a wedding—

On looking again, I observe the clergyman in the distance (who happens to be a stranger to me, doing duty for our curate, away on a holiday), appearing very impatient, and wondering why we don't come forward.

Presently the clerk begins beckoning to me, and I think it best to go up and explain.

"Come, come, my dear sir," says the strange clergyman, "you'll be too late directly. Do make haste, if you want to be married."

"The fact is," I reply, "I don't want to be married."

"Good gracious!" says the strange clergyman. "I trust that the lady has not—"

"No, no," I hasten to assure him, "we're not the marriage—we're the christening."

"What made you say you wanted to be married, then?" says the strange clergyman, evidently very angry. "A joke of this kind—you will excuse my telling you, sir—is ill-timed and ill-placed in this sacred edifice."

I feel I am getting very hot and very red. I should like to knock the strange clergyman over backwards among the hassocks, but I refrain, and retire somewhat ignominiously, as it seems to me.

Meanwhile the wedding party don't show up. No more does Pincher—with the mug. Confound Pincher! I shan't forgive this very readily.

At length, after a longish wait, the strange clergyman determines on taking our case first, and, after a little awkwardness, owing to the clerk in the confusion

having opened his book for him at the funeral service, the ceremony begins.

I suppose it is not very long, but the twins are howling so loudly, I am not sure what is being said. Presently, however, I am asked for the twins' names, and have to hand up a twin.

Owing to more confusion, somebody hands me the wrong twin first, and that puts me out again so much that, for the life of me, I can think of nothing in the way of a name for him but Pincher.

It is not likely that I shall give him that one after what has occurred, and so in desperation I say "John!" and Twin No. 1 is so christened amidst general consternation.

I am then called upon for the name of No. 2 Twin, and have to hand him to the strange clergyman across the font, into which I as nearly as possible drop him; and, owing to my memory being at the time a perfect blank, No. 2 is called Thomas, to save time.

This is deuced awkward, but I don't see how it can be helped now.

And, now it is all over, here is Pincher—without the mug!



CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH IT IS A QUESTION OF THE TWINS'
TEETH.

I SHOULD feel extremely obliged to the reader if she (these chapters were never intended for the perusal of male persons) would kindly imagine that time has rolled on, and that the twins are some months older.

* * * * *

N.B.—The rolling on of time and the growth of twins are indicated by these stars.

* * * * *

I have made it up with Pincher. I have found that Pincher was not altogether to blame in not turning up in time at the ceremony. The sufferings, mental and physical, endured by Pincher upon the day of the ceremony, with regard to the mug, would appear to have been intense.

The number of times those poor old legs of his carried Pincher over the hill to the station and back again, to meet every train, you would hardly credit.

That his exertions were eventually crowned with success, I hasten to testify. The mug did come at last, and so indeed, did, a second mug also, which, in sheer desperation, Pincher had telegraphed for, when

he thought there was no chance of the original mug turning up.

Since then there have been County Court actions relative to the mug in question, and cross actions, from which serious unpleasantness has resulted. To speak of mugs since then, in Pincher's presence, is to bring about ebullitions of temper best avoided.

Since the ceremony, I regret to say, the twins have not been at all well. The abnormal wolfishness of the twins' appetites has largely subsided. They have had what Mrs. Montgomery describes as "nasty little rashes." They have had coughs and colds, and spasmodic twitchings of an alarming character, and Mrs. Montgomery says it's "all the teeth."

It would appear that the twins are backward in their teething, and that the rashes, coughs, colds, and spasmodic twitchings are the natural results of this backwardness.

I say, "Oughtn't something to be done?" and Mrs. Montgomery produces a teething mixture composed of tincture of cinnamon and powdered chalk, and we administer it according to the written instructions, at the rate of two teaspoonfuls per twin three times per diem, but it doesn't seem to do any particular good.

Can it be possible, I ask myself, that Mrs. Montgomery is wrong respecting the twins' ailment? Fortunately, I have a work I have recently purchased treating of infants' ailments, and I look up "Teething" in the index.

The book says, "The period when the teeth may be expected is indicated by an increased irritability of the infant."

To judge by these indications, this would seem to be the period—only that, to the best of my recollection, the twins have always been rather irritable. Are they more so now than usual?

As yet, as there are none of the signs of the teeth coming through the gums, indicated in the work of reference, I cannot quite make up my mind whether or not Mrs. Montgomery is not labouring under a delusion. One reason for my having my doubts respecting Mrs. M.'s knowledge is, that I strongly suspect her of fixing the name of the complaint after finding the recipe, instead of first settling what the complaint is. Mrs. Montgomery, as a mother of four, however, being the only one of the eleven concerned with any practical knowledge on the subject of infant ailments, Bathsheba, Cassandra, Ursula, Rosabel, Aurora, Beatrix, Maud, the twins, and I, are compelled to bow to her decision, and respectively buy, mix, administer, or swallow, as the case may be, the medicines prescribed.

A prey to varied emotions, I go over the hill for a constitutional, and accidentally meet my old friend Dr. Bloggs—Bloggs of ours—who is quartered at the market town.

This is, it seems to me, a capital opportunity of getting an opinion on the case, and I artfully lure Bloggs in the direction of my house, and insist on his coming in and having a glass of sherry and a biscuit.

With the sherry and the biscuit I, with more artfulness, produce a twin—the most irritable one—and ask him what he thinks of it.

I have since had reason to believe that Bloggs has not given much attention to the ailments of infancy,

and is better at cutting off legs or sewing wounds up with wire.

He says, "What's that?"

I reply, "My nephew—a fine little fellow, don't you think? One of two—twins."



Bloggs—his joke.

He says, "Looks unwholesome, don't he?"

I hardly like this way of putting it, but I don't think Bloggs means any harm. He has a rough way with him, that is all.

I say, "I think he is out of sorts just now—I am told he is teething. But, I suppose, as soon as he cuts his teeth——"

"That doesn't follow," says Bloggs. "There are several diseases that teething gives rise to—as, for instance, convulsions, water on the brain, rickets, and re-

mittent fevers. He might be sickening for one of them—perhaps the lot.”

I gasp as he enumerates these horrors, and drink off half a glass of sherry to steady my nerves.

“I—I hope it won’t be so serious as all that!” I say; “but what disturbs me most is that I can’t help thinking it’s a back tooth he is going to cut first. If that’s the case, what would you advise?”

“If that *is* the case,” says Bloggs, “I should be inclined to have it out right off. I don’t see what else could be done.” And with this Bloggs puts on his hat, and prepares to take his departure.

Confound Bloggs! I’m sorry now I wasted the sherry and biscuits on him. I remember, in my time, the fellow was a confirmed practical joker. Yet, again, he seemed in earnest. What ought I to do?

I have it. I’ll go and see my friend Bowden, and take the twins with me.

When I say I will take the twins, I mean I will accompany some member of my household, who will carry the twins—or, more properly speaking, perhaps two members of my household, who will carry a twin each—say Rosabel and Aurora.

Although not, strictly speaking, members of my household, Mrs. Montgomery and her two other daughters, Beatrix and Maud, are pretty frequently with us, and, hearing what I propose, think it will be a capital opportunity to go up to town and do a little shopping.

The Girls, acquainted with this project, also intimate a desire to shop, and think they cannot do better than join the party.

This is not, strictly speaking, quite what I desired, but I don't know exactly how to refuse, so we all start together, and I pay the nine fares.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH THE TWINS CAUSE MORE ANXIETY.

MY friend Bowden has a first floor in Charles Street, St. James's, of reasonable dimensions ; but, as we approach it, I have an uneasy suspicion that we shall make rather a crowd in his drawing-room.

As this reflection occurs to me, I look up and observe my friend Bowden at the window, and wonder whether he thinks I'm bringing him a lady's school.

Under these circumstances, therefore, I induce six of the party to go and eat buns at a neighbouring baker's, and, accompanied by Aurora and Rosabel, consult my friend Bowden about the twins' teeth. He is not of opinion that the back teeth will come first ; on the contrary, he gives the preference to the central incisors, and is of opinion that after them we may expect the lateral incisors, and then not be surprised to see some of the canines. In the meanwhile, he thinks the twins appear to be getting on as well as

can be expected, and is not in favour of an operation being performed just yet awhile on either of them.

After which he insists upon Rosabel, Aurora, and I taking a glass of his particular port, and just half a glass each afterwards, and the time passes quite pleasantly until a couple of patients arrive, and we all have a kind of guilty consciousness of the mamma, and the



Poof!

Girls, and Beatrix, and Maud languishing round the corner on dry buns.

I don't know how it is, but few things in life seem to me much more enjoyable than visiting your Dentist when it is not your own tooth that is to be operated on.

The six at the Pastrycook's are waiting for us, and glad we have come. There are only the buns to pay for, and we may start.

After this the ladies do a little shopping, and I wait outside the shops, and then we go to the "Criterion,"

and have a little lunch, and take the train home. It is not, perhaps, a cheap trip this, but it is a very pleasant one. The twins are more than usually irritable. That is all there is to complain of.



The twins go on that night in a way we are unused to, even in them.



What is to be done?

In the morning Mrs. Montgomery (she and her two other daughters stayed here last night—it was so late for them to go home—and I slept on the parlour sofa) knocks at the parlour door, and beseeches me to lose no time, but run for the Doctor.

I run with all my might, and come full butt against Pincher round a corner. I tell Pincher what a state of mind I am in, and we run together. We bring back the best of the two local Doctors, and he gives the twins something soothing, and leaves them apparently

easier in their minds, but he says it will be a good job when it is all over.

We think so too, and seek our couches that night, worn and weary, at an earlier hour than usual. According to my friend Bowden, the twins' teeth were not far off; but the local Doctor says it may be weeks, and there is no telling which twin will survive. Certainly not both.

* * * * *

Another day has dawned. A report reaches me that the twins are sitting up in their little cot, radiant as sunshine. Presently I go to the nursery, and pass my finger gently into Twin No. 1's mouth.

He bites it.

I don't give No. 2 a chance, but I grapple with him and examine his jaw.

Both twins have cut their central incisors!



"He's cut 'em."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN WHICH SOMEBODY DOES SOMETHING SILLY.

THIS has really not been at all a pleasant morning. The local tradesmen's quarterly bills have just come in, and I find them considerably larger than usual.

I observe, in going into details, that the physic for the twins is the principal item in the local Doctor's account. Casting my eye over the Grocer's account, I perceive that the twins' "foods" come to money. Yet I am inclined to think that our increase of expenditure may also, to some extent, be attributed to other causes. When I casually mention that I have recently learnt that it is Aurora's opinion that the best fresh butter, and the best fresh butter alone, is absolutely necessary for all culinary purposes, I trust that the sagacious reader will find a wink to be equal to a nod.

In addition to the circumstance above alluded to, I may, I trust, be pardoned if I state what might almost appear like a truism, namely, that although possibly upon occasion what was enough for one has been found to be enough for two, what was enough for Dawkins does not entirely suffice for five. I allude to the fact that, of late, Mrs. Montgomery and her two other daughters pretty well live here.

In the character of host, I am willing to allow that a hearty appreciation of the viands decking my humble board is what I desire to see, and it is, possibly,

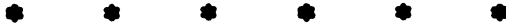
almost ungentlemanly—unmanly even, I may say—to count up what it costs to support these four young and lovely girls and their mamma; yet, you know, as I have to pay——

With regard to the other Girls—the old original ones—I notice, with some uneasiness, that they are not altogether what they used to be. To some extent the air of contentment which was one of their chief characteristics in times gone by exists no longer. The advent of the military, which, it may be recollected, I foresaw would bring trouble to our hitherto happy home, has wrought havoc and desolation.

A flightiness hitherto undreamt of has taken possession of the Girls, and the stock-in-trade of the chief Linendraper at the neighbouring market town no longer suffices for their wants. Journeys to town for the purpose of shopping are of frequent occurrence, and Aurora, Rosabel, Beatrix, Maud, and their mamma go shopping too, and have their purchases put down in the Girls' bills.

Upon my venturing to remonstrate—attempts at the assertion of my authority have not recently been successful enough to warrant frequent repetition—the Girls' conduct is most extraordinary.

“One might as well be an oyster at once, as live in this stupid humdrum hole,” exclaims Bathsheba, “and I, for one, will endure it no longer!”



Although I have most effectually sent the bold private soldiers to the right about, I find my house con-

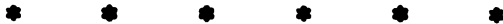
stantly besieged by the officers from the neighbouring town, who ride over, lunch, and dine, and take tea with us any number of times a week, and occasionally stay to supper. To say that their spurs have ruined all my chair-legs and frayed my best drawing-room carpet, would be to say nothing; and, indeed, perhaps I ought not to mention it here.

Cassandra says, "Perhaps some day they may no longer annoy you by their presence."

I think that is more than probable. I expect they will change their quarters soon, and I shan't be sorry.

Bless me!

A sudden light has broken in upon me, and I am absolutely dazzled. The Girls actually—at their time of life, too! and especially Bathsheba, at her time of life—labour under the impression that these young fellows come here rasping my chair-legs on account of— Upon my word of honour, it is too ridiculous!



I am, at this moment, in my *sanctum sanctorum*, grappling with the Butcher's bill, when there comes a soft tap at the door. Probably Aurora, to consult me about to-day's dinner. In that case, I must be firm with her. Even if she calls me a Cross Old Thing, I must still be steadfast to my purpose. This reckless extravagance can no longer continue.

"Come in!"

It is Aurora's mamma. "Oh, Major, I hope I am not disturbing you," she says; "but I do so much want to have a few moments' serious talk with you

about—you, however, no doubt, know what I would say."

I reply that, if the truth must be told, I have not the remotest notion.

She seems surprised at this, and says, "In that case I cannot be too explicit. In these cases one never can."

I bow. What's coming, I wonder?

"Major," she says, "I of course speak on behalf of my children. That you had long ago won the respect, the esteem—nay, why should I not say the love and affection?—of all, can be no secret to you, and I will not, I cannot deny that in whatever direction your preference may lie, there will always be a certain amount of disappointment, which, however, you must not, nay, you should not, permit to influence your choice."

"You'll excuse me, Mrs. Montgomery," I observe, "but what in the name of goodness do you mean?"

"I simply mean," says Mrs. Montgomery, "that as a mother I cannot permit this distracting uncertainty any longer to continue, and I must insist on your saying which it is."

"Good gracious me, ma'am!" I gasp out, "if any member of your accomplished and amiable family labours under the idea that I am going to propose to her, she is, I may say, utterly mistaken. If—if I ever intended to do such a thing, I—I should select some one more of my own age—some one—I trust you understand me."

"Oh, Major," says Mrs. Montgomery, "I do now; but until this moment I had not the faintest suspicion

of the real state of your feelings. I cannot, it is true, give you in return a girl's first love, for I will not deny that one, who is now no more, I loved deeply and devotedly——”

“Confound it, ma'am!” I cry out, “this is getting right down ridiculous. You must be a stupid old fool!”



CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH TWOPENNY TURNS UP.

THERE have been scenes! Several scenes! Everything is at an end every way. Everybody is going. Everybody is packing up. Every one has denounced me. It would appear that I ought to be ashamed of myself: I am not sure I am not.

Aurora and Rosabel's little luggage stands in the hall; the carrier's cart will fetch it presently. They have clung to the Girls and wept, but they say 't is better thus. The Girls say that this is no longer a home for them either. They themselves appear to be only waiting for the men with the spurs to turn up and carry them off. Presently the twins and I will be alone in our glory.

In the midst of all this a shabby stranger arrives, with a single knock. I open the door to him, and he hands me a thumb-marked, crumpled envelope, containing a note to this effect:

“SIR,—Excuse the liberty I take in addressing you, but want must plead as my excuse. If you can oblige me with the loan of a pound or fifteen shillings until the end of the week, when I expect to sell some shares in a public company, I should feel obliged.

“Your affectionate brother-in-law,

“PERCY TWOPENNY.

“P.S.—Perhaps you would like to buy some of the shares yourself. My friend, whom you can trust with the money, has them with him. Please make it a pound if possible.”

This, then, is the father of the Twins!!!

* * * * *

The man has gone, and I did not kick him. Neither did I send the money or buy the shares.

* * * * *

Three days have elapsed since Rosabel and Aurora quitted my house. The Girls have cried almost incessantly. We are all very wretched. I almost wish some of those young fellows with the spurs would turn up again, if only for a change.

But they don't. The Girls seem to think this singular.

At last one does turn up—not, however, one of the most regular of our visitors; but I welcome him cordially, and ask after the four regular ones, Bragshaw, Bagshaw, Ragshaw, and Wagshaw (these names will do as well as any others). My visitor looks knowing. He supposes they're more agreeably engaged. By the way, they are all *engaged*. Didn't I know?

"Engaged! to whom?" I ask.

"Go on," he says. "Why, it was you brought it all about. They told me so. They're nice girls, ain't they? Not much tin, but deuced nice."

"D—d—do you mean the Miss Montgomerys?" I stammer.

He does! How am I to break this to those poor, wretched, miserable, unhappy Girls?



Three weeks have elapsed. It has been broken to those poor, wretched, miserable, unhappy Girls, and they are bad! Just at present they talk of emigrating, or going out to the seat of war as hospital nurses. Just at present I don't think it is any particular good trying to conciliate them.

They say the Montgomery girls are deceitful cats.



Of course I only ask out of sheer curiosity, but I wonder whether either Rosabel, Aurora, Beatrix, or

Maud really did entertain any, and, in that case, whether they wanted to make sure before settling with the young fellows with the spurs.



The shabby man again, and another rather shabbier—Twopenny, the father of the twins.

Both appear to be the worse for liquor. Twopenny says he is the twins' legal protector, and wants to take them away with him. I ask, Where? He says, the workhouse, in which it is his intention to end his days.

I say, "Look here, Twopenny, this sort of thing won't do, you know. Don't you come here trying on this sort of thing any more, because it won't do."

He says (with a hiccup), "Give me my children. It is but right that I should have them. Am I not their sole surviving parent?"

His friend adds, "Certainly, old boy. Don't you stand none of his nonsense."

I do not, however, give Twopenny his twins, as desired, but I give him a trifle in silver instead, and he goes away in a happier frame of mind, with another hiccup.

Will he come back again, though?

I expect he will.



Three months have elapsed. The poor blighted Girls are still living beneath my roof.

So are the twins.

Twopenny sends for them at intervals, dating his letters from various casual wards, hospitals, and police stations, but they are still with me.

The Montgomery girls are married.

My solicitor tells me Mrs. Montgomery has no case, but I must personally defend the action. He says that in these breach of promise businesses the man always gets awfully guyed, but I mustn't mind that. I am trying not to mind much. I am trying to look forward to the guying with indifference, and am trying to pretend I shall rather enjoy it.

* * * * *

Three years have elapsed.

The Girls have not emigrated as yet. A new Curate has come down to our parish. We have him in to tea pretty frequently. He has a taste for music, and is fond of water-colour painting; he also is a collector, in a small way, of old china. We are not quite sure in which direction he may indicate a preference, but at present I see no reason why I should offer any opposition.

He is a man of superior attainments, and has a great deal of shrewd common sense. I read him all my letters to the editor of the "Times," and he is of opinion that it is a shame they are not inserted.

It is over a year since I last saw anything of Twopenny. This may be a good sign. I shan't advertise for him. He may turn up again, and he mayn't. There's an amount of uncertainty about it, it is true, which is in a way worrying, but I think I prefer the uncertainty to Twopenny as a present and palpable fact.

I have pretty well got over the recollections of my sufferings in that confounded law court; pretty nearly, but not quite.

There are other recollections, too, associated with the name of Montgomery, not quite so easily got over, perhaps.

But I don't mention this before the Girls.

I should feel obliged if you too would not mention this before the Girls.

The twins have been short-coated some time now.



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